

HERISTAL'S WIFE

By Cecil Adair.

Author of many "JOY OF LIFE" Novels

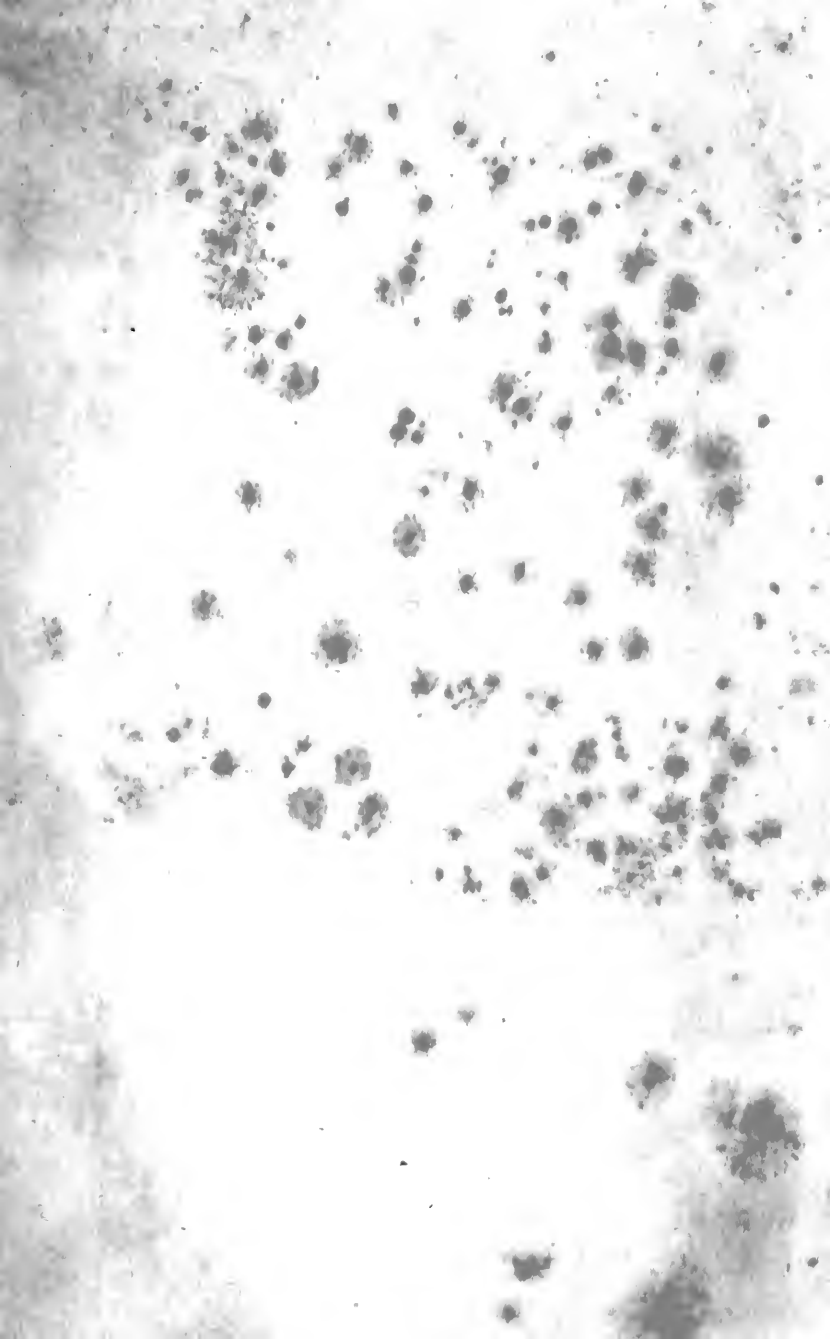




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HERISTAL'S WIFE

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Novels of Cecil Adair

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HERISTAL'S WIFE

BY

CECIL ADAIR

Author of "Gabriel's Garden," "Under the Incense
Trees," "Angels' Tears," "The Maid of
the Moonflower," etc.

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HERISTAL'S WIFE

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE OF HERISTAL

MARCUS HERISTAL stood in the solitude of his great library, his back to the leaping fire, his face to the great oriel window through which the delicate shining of the February sunlight could be seen, playing upon leafless trees, and the white mistiness of frost-encrusted lawn ; and it was the face of a man conscious of a task before him which required skilful manipulation, yet conscious also of some inherent and intuitive ability to handle a difficult situation.

He was a very tall man, some six foot three in height, and looking even more from the fact that, though broad-shouldered and muscular, he was very spare in build.

A fine-looking rather than a handsome man, his was a face which was extremely distinguished, with a look of race and descent in every clean-cut feature. The bony structure of the face was rather unusually noticeable, with the jut of a rather prominent aquiline nose, its nostrils finely cut, a forceful chin, and a straight firm mouth which in repose gave an effect of sternness. Eyes somewhat deeply set, dark grey in colour with a calm level directness of outlook, which could kindle in a very attractive way, or more occasionally soften to a tenderness which transformed the whole face.

Marcus Heristal had succeeded to title and estates only three months ago. He had succeeded his grandfather as seventh baron of the line. There had been

no child save his father, who had died seven years previously, and his mother Márcus could not remember. His own life had been somewhat solitary ; but it had been full of interest for him. His father loved travel ; the lad had loved adventure, and had known much of it. His education had been carried on along normal lines—the grandfather had seen to that. But in his holidays and vacations he had joined his father abroad, and after taking his degree had struck out a line of his own, which his father had suggested, and which offered extremely interesting experiences and as much of travel and adventure as his nature craved.

Mr. Heristal, who had some capital at command, had developed a fancy for purchasing a dilapidated villa or vineyard or ancient château or tract of waste land, spending freely in developing the resources of such a spot, and selling again at a satisfactory though not excessive profit. His first ventures had been with a view to some residence for himself and his son, but the roving fit was strong upon him, and, after all, no residence would really be permanent, since he and the boy must eventually inherit the Heristal titles and honours.

Occasionally, the old Lord Heristal suggested half-heartedly that son and grandson might with advantage make a home with him—recluse though he had become. But the delight of their method of living had its grip upon both father and son, and they very well knew that their presence at Heristal was not really wanted. They had now a good command of capital. Their ventures were made on a larger scale. Their successes were the rule, their failures the exception. Marcus found himself a rich man on his father's death ; but he continued to adventure his capital in the same fashion. At the time of his succession to the barony and Heristal Castle, he owned property in many quarters of the globe, and was only waiting till the necessary business incident to the death of the head of the family had

been put through, before starting off to realize some of this property now on the market, and wind up his affairs in other lands.

One friendship Marcus had made during his young manhood. His father had one relation of his own race, a second cousin, Reginald Heristal by name, to whom he and his son had been much attached. About twelve years older than Marcus and fifteen years younger than Mr. Heristal, he became the friend and intimate of both. The tragedy of his life had been a very early marriage with a lovely girl of Italian extraction, whom his kinsmen had never seen. There had been one little girl, whose birth had cost the mother her life. The child had been reared during her earliest years by some Sisters of Mercy in a convent. From time to time Marcus had heard her mentioned—"little Lenore" his cousin called the child—as having been sent to some school, generally a convent school, and later on in her girlhood to an Anglican sisterhood in Devonshire, so as to become conversant with the language and traditions of the country to which she really belonged.

Then three years ago, when Marcus was five-and-twenty, and was back on a visit to England himself, the utterly unexpected happened.

Reginald Heristal had settled himself in a pleasant furnished house in Devonshire, which he rented by the year, and Lenore, who was then eighteen, was to come to him there.

Marcus was with his cousin when the "little Lenore" arrived; and on her appearance upon the scene this utterly unexpected *dénouement* took place.

Marcus fell in love with her practically at first sight. She was then a slip of a girl, tall and slender, with delicate features very beautifully cut, a transparent complexion ordinarily pale, though capable of a lovely flush in moments of excitement. Beneath the perfect arch of night-black brows a pair of dreamy dark eyes of haunting beauty looked out. The expression was

strangely imaginative ; often the night-black pools of mystery seemed to glow with an inward light which it caught his breath to watch. He talked with her very little. He was conscious in her presence of some quality of remoteness, something supremely delicate in her mental poise. Her voice was low and full of musical cadences. But she seldom spoke in his presence. She spent her time for the most part in the garden, or in the little old church at the gates. Her life had accustomed her to keeping hours of meditation and devotion.

Lenore never missed a service. Marcus had never attended so many as during that week, when he knew that, unseen by her, he could watch her at her devotions. The dark bowed head, its thick silky clustering curls covered by a lace mantilla, the lovely upturned face he glimpsed at times, the grace of the slender shape, held his eyes. The sound of her low sweet voice intoning the responses was music to his ears.

Before he left, he had told his secret to the father. Later on, he came again, and pleaded his own cause with the girl. She received his confession with widely opened considering eyes, with no access of colour in her cheeks, and in a soft silence symptomatic with her of that dreamy habit of mind which is slow to take full cognisance of exterior and material things. When spoken, her answer had been gentle, yet decisive. She felt no desire for marriage. She had come to be with her father. She wished to assist him and to make his home happy. She must try to take her mother's place in his lonely life. Beyond that she had no thought. There was in her being a strange mingling of the innocent unknowing child, and the mystically swayed maiden, whose aspirations rise far above the plane of mortality. Marcus knew himself beaten. He had been premature. She was scarcely out of her cloistered life ; of the life outside its walls she had no understanding. She was not even greatly disturbed or fluttered by his suggestion, so gentle was the form his wooing had worn. They remained

friends, as they had been before ; and with the flight of time this friendship became firmly cemented, and he was content.

Then at the time when old Lord Heristal lay slowly dying, Lenore's father was taken suddenly and alarmingly ill. The term of occupation of their Devonshire house was just expiring ; the medical men hurried the patient up to London and into a nursing home, where after two severe operations he succumbed and died ; whilst Lenore, who had spent the inclement winter weeks tramping between her lodgings and the Nursing Home, was prostrated by illness herself, which developed after the funeral into double pneumonia, and she had a very narrow escape of her life.

Marcus, by that time Lord Heristal and head of the family, took matters into his own hands. Lenore had been in charge of a most excellent nurse, who had a little home of her own, where a few patients could be accommodated. But she was about to give up a life which had grown somewhat too hard for her of late years. Lord Heristal made her a generous offer. She was to bring Miss Heristal down to Heristal Castle as soon as leave could be obtained for the transit by private motor-car ; and after that to take her abroad to avoid the inclemencies of the English spring, Lord Heristal making all arrangements for their journey and their destination.

For Marcus had learned on the death of Reginald Heristal that his cousin's pecuniary affairs were in hopeless condition. Advised by an unscrupulous lawyer, he had been practically living on capital for many years, and it was plain (though it could not be proved) that quite a large slice of his property had been made away with, including the portion of his wife, which he had believed was safely secured to Lenore. As a matter of fact there was almost nothing for Lenore to inherit.

But Marcus was her guardian, and although she would be of age now in two or three months, this gave him

his present opportunity—or so he hoped—of bringing into being a certain plan, which he trusted might be easily carried through, in measure owing to her youth and inexperience, and her temperamental detachment from the things of material life.

Slowly the door opened. In came the nurse, her kindly face all smiles, her strong capable hand giving some support to the feeble steps of her charge. Lenore looked scarcely older than when he had seen her first three years ago, so slender and childlike was her appearance in her clinging black draperies. Her great dark eyes sought his face with a pathetic wistfulness of appeal. She looked terribly fragile, and his heart ached for her ; but Nurse Frome settled her comfortably in the big chair placed for her beside the paper-strewn table, and with plenty of cheerful words for them both left them together for this needful business conference.

Although Lenore had been a week at Heristal Castle, she had scarcely seen her kinsman till now. She occupied with Nurse Frome a wing of her own. Marcus had been there on her arrival, to superintend her transit to her rooms ; but after that he wished her to dismiss from her mind the thought that he was her host. As head of the house he had the right to bring her here ; but not with any view of intruding upon her. As for renewing his suit—he had set that matter far from him. It was quite unthinkable that it should ever take form again whilst she was in his charge.

Lenore was not in the least afraid of her tall kinsman. She looked at him now with an expression full of confidence and sweetness.

“ I do not try to thank you, Marcus, for all that you have done and been to us. . . .”

“ That is not needed between us, is it, Lenore ? I wish that I could have done more. But let us leave all that. We have now to think of the next step. You know that you are ordered abroad for some months—that probably you should remain through next winter

also in a warm and pleasant climate. Nurse Frome will go with you ; and I think that I have found the right place."

"Have you, Marcus? Where is it? Have all these papers spread on your table anything to do with it?"

He looked steadily at her. He seemed to be communing with himself. He spoke :

"Lenore, you remember my telling you the story about a property I had acquired in that island of the Mediterranean looking towards the Algerian coast—the house and its gardens—and the story which attached to it?"

Her big dark eyes lifted to his with a softly shining eagerness of expression.

"Of course I remember it, Marcus! I was so interested. I always am about such places, which have been Church property once and then changed into other uses. That makes me sorry. I do not think it should be done. But that, of course, is not your act."

"No," he answered. "In this case the change was made more than three hundred years ago, and the property has changed hands many times since. Lenore, would it please you to see that place? Would you like to live for a time in Saint Cecilia's island, and grow well and strong there?"

"Marcus—it would be beautiful, I think. And it is your house now, is it not?"

For a few moments he paused, his steady eyes upon her sensitive face.

"It has been mine for a term," he answered. "But it is just changing hands now. Those papers on the table will tell you all about it. Lenore, I will not beat about the bush. The plain truth of the matter is just this. La Maison Monastère, as it is named, belongs now to you. As your guardian I hold authority over it still ; but in a few months more it will be absolutely yours to do with as you will."

Her sensitive face suddenly flushed, and then gradually grew pale.

"I find it difficult to understand what you are saying, Marcus."

"I will try in a few words to say what is necessary. Your father consulted me about his affairs when he felt himself past recovery. I made inquiries, and discovered that they were in a confused state. It worried him sadly. And I made a suggestion to him. I am, as you probably know, possessed of several properties in different countries, which I am going to sell off now that I am owner of Heristal. One of these is this *Maison Monastère*, in which you once showed interest. I suggested to him that this should be transferred to you, in lieu of what you might eventually inherit from him after his affairs were put in order. But as this settlement would take time, and as the sale or transfer would be a very simple matter, we decided that it should be put through at once. It will secure you a home and an adequate income for its maintenance, which I need not explain about now, as until you come of age you will not need to master the technical details. It will be easier for you to grasp these after you have been living there for a time. But when you leave England, you go to your own house."

Her eyes never left his face. Often he had watched them and thought of them as homes alike of delicate dreams and of mystic musings. But now there was a different look in them, very earnest, just a little perplexed, yet gradually growing in determination, just as did the lines of her pale spiritual face.

"Marcus, I think I understand what you really mean. You are making me a great and beautiful gift, because you do not know how things will be for me when all comes to be known about our affairs. Do not try and deceive me, Marcus. Let me know the truth. What you are offering me is just a splendid gift from yourself?"

"I cannot quite tell as to that. I may be able to

save more from the wreck than looks probable at this moment." He had to speak the truth with those eyes upon him. "But even should it work out as in part—in large part—my gift to you, Lenore; the gift of the head of the house to his ward and kinswoman on her coming of age, would that irk or displease you so much? I think you would be happy in your home."

"I think I should. I thought so when you told me of it. Marcus, I want to go there. I feel that it would be good for me to do so. But I can only accept such a gift on one condition. I can only go there as . . ."

She paused. Her face flushed and paled; her eyes had the shining of stars as she raised them for a moment and dropped them again. Her loveliness clutched at his heart.

"As what, Lenore? Let me hear it all. Do not be afraid."

She looked long at him, and then the words came in a low sweet whisper—

"As your wife, Marcus."

CHAPTER II

A TROTHPLIGHT

"**A**S your wife, Marcus." Those were the words which Lenore had spoken—spoken very low, and with a glance which thrilled his very soul. His wife! That exquisite creature! The being whom for three long years he had loved with the tenacity of a strong, self-restrained nature, and knew that for him there would be no change.

She was looking at him with a soft gentleness of expression which always thrilled him to the core. There was no trace of confusion or embarrassment in that look. It

held in its scope some element of unsullied childhood, just as her frail lithe form retained the flower-like grace of those who keep the dew of radiant youth fresh within them. He gazed at her, his soul in his eyes, and very quietly put a question.

"Do you mean that, Lenore? Are you willing to be—my wife?"

There was a swift appeal in the dark eyes lifted to his face.

"You know you asked me once, Marcus. But I scarcely knew you then. I know you a great deal better now. Father loved you. He has talked to me a great deal. He would have been very glad to know this. Perhaps he does know. I would like to be your wife, Marcus. Truly I would."

There was no doubting the sincerity of those words; and yet as he met the clear, pure shining of those virginal eyes, Marcus Heristal knew as well as though all her sweet soul lay bare before him, that she no more knew the fundamental significance of the marriage bond than the child gauges its powers who plays beside the advancing waves of the strong salt sea.

Could he take advantage of such ignorance and innocence? Might there not be some risk to face which might bring bitter fruit into being later on? That she should turn to him with this adorable confidence and affection made his heart leap in proud gladness; yet all the more for this perfect trust in him must he hold himself in leash. Custom and an iron will had helped to crystallize his temperament into a singular silent forcefulness. Lenore felt its strength and protective power. Therefore, she felt how good it was to place herself and her future in his powerful hands.

But the pause he made before responding to her last words vaguely troubled her.

"Marcus, if you have changed—of course, that changes everything. It was because I thought . . . of what you wanted once . . . that I spoke."

Then some barrier fell. He saw that his silence was open to misconstruction. He stretched out his long strong arm across the table which divided them, and he took and held her hand in its close virile clasp.

"I have never changed, Lenore. I think I am not made that way. I loved you when I saw you first. I love you to-day. I shall love you through all eternity. To call you wife will be to me life's golden crown. But I want to know that you are making me this gracious, wonderful, glorious surrender not just from gratitude and friendship, but because," his voice fell to a lower note, and there was an odd vibration in its tones, "but because—you have learned to love me, Lenore."

As he spoke he saw a glad light dawn in her eyes. The fingers he had clasped quivered in his palm. She brought her other hand round and clasped his with a soft tenacity.

"Marcus, indeed, indeed, I do love you very much. I have such a warm feeling for you in my heart. I could not face life alone. I do not know what would become of me without you. You have done everything, been everything, to us through this time of trouble; and now I understand how you have been thinking for me in the future. But, Marcus, you must see, do you not?—that I could only take this wonderful gift at your hand, only go to this beautiful life and place you have prepared for me—as your wife? Anything else would be impossible. But you say you want me still! And I want you!"

He stood up suddenly, disengaging his hand from her clasp, but only to come round to her side, to kneel upon one knee before her.

"Lenore, my little Lenore, if I were only sure you knew what you were offering!"

She looked earnestly into his eyes. Then she placed her two soft hands round his face, whilst in her pale cheek a very soft rose bloom showed exquisitely. The wistful charm that sorrow had stamped upon her young

face lifted a little, and a bright musing mystery began to illuminate it.

"Marcus," she said, "I think I know what you mean. When I read about love, I feel that there are depths in it which I do not truly understand. I may not be able to give you everything that some other woman might. I think we are not all made alike in that particular way. . . ."

"I only ask of you to be yourself, your sweet, pure, perfect self, Lenore. And to give me what you can. I will ask for nothing more."

"I can give you myself, dear Marcus," she answered, "and all the love which I understand. And perhaps I shall learn how to give more as I grow older. Father used to tell me that there were new worlds for me still to discover. Perhaps you will help me to find them—with you!"

He took her hands in his and kissed them one after the other. He did not seek her lips as yet, nor did she offer them. She put her hands upon his shoulders, and, holding him a little away, looked very earnestly at him as she spoke again.

"Marcus, there is just one more thing which I think you should consider. I love to think that you want me, that I stand first with you. I think it will be great happiness when I am in that beautiful island, and you are far away—for you have to go far away for a time I know—to feel that I am your wife, that you are thinking of me, and will come back to me by and by. But suppose when you are far away, or at any time later, there should cross your path some beautiful, intellectual, wonderful woman who could be more to you than I . . ."

"Dismiss that thought from your mind, Lenore," spoke Marcus in his deep tones; "I have been much about the world. I have met many such women as you have in your thoughts. Not one of them has ever won a second thought from me. You need not fear that peril for me."

He dwelt with a little emphasis upon the last word ; but she did not heed that. Her eyes were full of happy light.

" I love to hear you say so, Marcus ; for when you say a thing I feel that it is true, and that it will not change."

" But I am glad you spoke as you did, Lenore ; for it enables me to say to you what you have said to me. Supposing into your young life there came in the future some masculine influence different from anything you have so far known? You say that there are tracts of undiscovered country in the land of love which your feet have not explored as yet. Suppose I could not lead you there—and that some other had that power? "

" Don't, Marcus. I do not understand you. I do not think I want to understand. If I am your wife nobody could show me or teach me anything that you could not. I know that terrible and wicked things do happen in the world. I am not a child. But I know that nothing that is unworthy or vile could ever touch or smirch you, and I am sure that you would stand between me and all that was wicked. Oh you need never be afraid of that ! It hurts me that you should even think of it ! "

" Only for your protection, my child. You are about to take a very grave step. It is right that you should look all round you. If later on you should find you had made a mistake . . . "

" But that is impossible. Whom could I care for as I care for you ? Father said just the same. And he knew a great deal about men and the world. He said you were one in ten thousand . . . "

The pained perplexity in her trusting eyes, just dashed with reproach, vanquished Marcus as he watched it. What more could he say than he had said ? How could he repudiate the sweet surrender, the offer she had made ? His whole being ached for her—and he knew that there would be an ordeal before him yet. But

at least she would be his in name and in measure. For the perfection of their union he might find it well to wait. But he saw from her point of view that she had judged wisely and well. As Heristal's wife she could occupy a position which would free her from many perplexities and anxieties. And as her womanhood developed she would come to understand the true meaning of her wifhood. He must needs leave her for a time. Her health, and his affairs in many parts of the world, would sunder them temporarily. But she would be waiting for him in the home he had prepared ; and some day they would return here to Heristal itself, and life would surely open before them both in all the glory of their golden love.

"Lenore," he said in his deep tender tones, "then let us agree in this, that the love which has grown up between us in these three years shall be the pledge and assurance of even more beautiful things to come. You give yourself to me without fear. I will take you without any qualm—with the thankfulness of a man who attains the desire of his heart. And though for a time circumstances will part us, we shall have the future to look forward to, which shall see us united in a life that I will seek to make as joyous for you as mine with you must needs be."

There was a great peacefulness now in the full dark gaze she bent on him.

"We take each other for better, for worse," she said softly, "and if just at the first it is 'worse' because we have to part, we shall both be looking forward to the beautiful 'better' which lies before us when you come back to me!"

"You will feel it like that, Lenore?"

"Why surely," she answered, and her sudden radiant smile thrilled his heart.

"Will you kiss me, Lenore?" he asked with a strange humility for one of his dominating temperament.

As simply and sweetly as a child she gave him her

lips. No trace of passion was in that kiss of betrothal ; yet even so it was infinitely sweet—the foretaste of what was surely to follow.

“Are you happy, Lenore—my darling ?” he asked.

“I think I am very happy. I have not forgotten dear father. I miss him every day. But I am growing stronger. And life begins to look beautiful again. And now I belong to you, Marcus. That makes me truly happy.”

“God bless you for that word ! And may He deal with me in the future as I shall deal with you !” Her eyes kindled suddenly.

“Oh yes, ah yes ! I will echo that prayer. For I know that you will deal with me in such a beautiful way. Ah, Marcus, if you only knew how good it feels just to belong to you—to have you for more than a cousin and kinsman—some one who belongs to me, as much as I belong to you. You can scarcely understand what I mean, you who are so strong.”

“Strong enough for both of us, I hope, my Lenore. And now shall we talk a little about our future ? For matters begin to press upon us both. The doctors are very urgent that you shall get away as quickly as possible. A mild soft February is often followed by a cruel blustering March. As for me, I am needed in many places at once. I only wait to see you embark before I must be off to the other side of the world.”

“I know ; but I do not know how we get to Saint Cecilia’s island.”

“A man I know has lent me his yacht. It is lying now at Southampton. I shall see you safely on board after our marriage, and my boat sails from Southampton the day later than the one we have planned for your start. Nurse Frome is seeing to your outfit. She tells me that in her young life she was for a few years a stewardess, and loves the sea and is never ill. You are a good sailor as far as you know . . .”

“I think so. I have never taken a long voyage ;

but I was never ill on the Channel crossings when so many other people were. But, Marcus—a yacht! That sounds very expensive. Why cannot I go in a steamer like other people?”

His smile was very attractive.

“Perhaps because I do not consider that my wife is like other people. I regard her as a being rather particularly unique! As for the rest, I have done Rockminster some good turns in past years, when he was not such a big man as he is now; and he is very glad to do me a kindness now. He has finished a winter cruise himself, and is rather glad to have a job for his crew, before he goes off again. It would be a difficult journey for you to take just now; first to Marseilles, and then waiting for a boat, as very few touch at lonely St. Cecilia.”

“I think I like the thought of being rather lonely and shut away—till you can come to me, Marcus! But you will come, will you not?”

“Surely I will, when I can. But it may not be till the autumn or the close of the year. Will you be too lonely there, my darling?”

“Oh no! I do not think that I am ever what people call lonely; for I have my books and my work and my thoughts—and—and—my prayers for company. And I shall love my prayer hours better than ever before, now that I have—I shall have—my husband—to pray for, and to commit every day into God’s good keeping. Marcus, do you not feel that separation of the body need not mean separation of the spirit? Do you ever ponder the meaning of those wonderful words?—‘I believe in the Communion of Saints.’”

He lifted her hand and pressed his lips upon it.

He looked at her with the eyes of a man who worships.

“Marcus, is there a little chapel in that island home which you are making mine? I do not mean the village church, though I shall love that too. But when you told us of the house which had been set upon the site where a monastery had been destroyed by fire—pur-

posely and of wicked intent—did you not say that there was the fragment of a chapel that was left? That the flames and the missiles went wide of the Altar and its Cross? That the little half-ruined chapel or fragment was standing yet?”

“That is so, Lenore, and I have had it repaired so as to keep out the weather. There are many things I want to tell you about the place you are soon going to, but to-day you have talked long enough. I am going to ring for Nurse Frome to come and take you away to rest. Shall we tell her our beautiful pact, Lenore?”

For almost the first time in her life a rosy blush dyed Lenore's pale cheek.

“Oh yes, we must tell Nurse Frome,” she said; “she is such a dear. And she likes you so much, Marcus. She will understand.”

The summons was sent and the smiling buxom nurse appeared with kindly words for her young charge, who, as she expressed it, looked all the better for her little change of scene. Marcus went up and took her by the hand.

“Now, Nurse, what do you think I have got to tell you? Don't fall down flat with surprise when you hear!”

“Not likely, my lad—I should say my lord—after all the things I've had told me in my day. Maybe I can tell you your secret by the look on your face!”

“You see too much, I'm afraid! Take care they don't burn you as a witch out yonder! Yes, I am going to send you out there to that island with *Lady Heristal*. Mind you take good care of her; for the House of the Monastery has a queer history attached.”

“And you will tell it me another day, Marcus, and soon, will you not?”

“Yes, you shall hear all the tale as far as I know it very soon.”

CHAPTER III

ST. CHRYSOSTOM

“**Y**ES, sir, I think I fully understand all you mean. I thank you for speaking to me so kind and free of it all. My young lady has done the same, bless her. And though I can see you are both of you taking a bit of a risk, I do not think you need fear. She does not, the pretty lamb. She thinks all the world of you. She will weary after you when you are far away. Oh, she has the faithful heart! I know that very well. And she would not have taken this great gift at your hand in any other way. And there, sir, I think she is right. Yet if it be as you say, that her poor father left her so poorly provided for . . .”

“I can scarcely tell yet what may be saved from the wreck of his fortune; but it cannot be much. He was unpractical to a degree and very ill-advised, and also he was robbed in one of those ways which do not come under the ban of the law. Yet always I had meant this property which I bought a couple of years back, to be a gift to my young cousin. I shall never forget her face when I described it and told her a little about it. I thought then what a setting it would make for her lovely life. I am not ashamed to tell you that I fell in love almost at first sight. And now, when my hopes seem about to meet their full accomplishment, I am asking myself constantly whether I may be doing her a wrong—asking her to take too great a risk. Suppose, too late, another were to cross her path, who had power to win that which is not mine as yet . . .”

“I should not worry myself about that, sir, if you ask me. She is not one to let her fancies go gallivanting this way and that. It's you she wants, you she hungers for. Never mind whether she understands it fully

yet. She'll come to it gradual like whilst you're away. She will grow strong and well in that place you're sending us to. And when you come for her again, she'll be so truly glad to have you with her, that—well, you will see ! ”

“ I like to think you are a true prophet,” answered Marcus with his grave smile. “ And in truth I know that it was her father's great wish as well as mine. So now that she herself has consented, and if you, who know her and love her, approve the step . . . ”

“ I do, sir. She wants to be taken right away out of England. She's too frail to stand the bluster of March winds. She wants sea air and beautiful surroundings, and to be in a place where she does not miss her father at every turn. Ah ! here she comes, dear lamb ! She knows you are here, and she wants to talk with you, I know.”

“ Yes, but you need not go, Nurse. What I have to tell her will interest you also. And then make all your preparations as quickly as possible ; for I want her away out of the country as soon as may be. As you say, her frail aspect is a source of much anxiety.”

“ She will get the better of it, sir. She's young yet. Come, my pretty. Lord Heristal has things to say to us. And your memory will be better than mine. We are talking about that place where we are going to together after your wedding, where we will get you strong and well, ready for his lordship to come to you again ! ”

“ Ah yes, Marcus ! I hope to get quite strong out there in the lovely island of St. Cecilia. And I want to know more about the house you are sending me to . . . ”

“ Your own house now, Lenore, and one I think you will like. What I am quite sure about is that you will like the tiny chapel which still remains, and the old cloister which lies round it, close to the east side of the house—the little chapel of St. Chrysostom, as it is called.”

“ St. Chrysostom,” said Lenore with a dreamy smile ;

"he has been always one of my favourite saints. Marcus, was there not once a monastery where the house stands now?"

"Yes, I believe it was a very old foundation. But of its earlier history no traces seem forthcoming. What I have learnt is this. In the Middle Ages (rather an indefinite expression) it had grown into rather a large confraternity, and was inhabited by monks who called themselves Brothers of the Miséricorde. I fancy that for some time they lived strictly and did much good. This island itself is not large; but it is said traditionally that the monks used often to take ship for the mainland of Africa, and carry on missionary work there. I do not know whether the mass of legend grown up about them is fact or not. What apparently did happen was what happened in many other cases. Riches began to accumulate in their coffers, and corruption followed. The Brothers became ambitious, increased their building—some said it increased so rapidly that the powers of evil must have been invoked. Stories of their wealth and their malpractices began to circulate—although there are contradictory tales in circulation which deny all this, and declare that the Brothers led saintly and devoted lives to the last."

"Which do you believe, Marcus? I would so much better like to think that they were good men—that there would be beautiful thoughts and feelings left behind. For I think that places often hold the atmosphere—if that is the right word—which has belonged to them in the past. I would like to think it had been a holy and saintly place."

"And you may still hope that, Lenore; for the mass of legend and tradition is quite contradictory and confused."

"Yet the Monastery was done away with. How was that, Marcus? I think that it was a dreadful thing to pull down those beautiful homes of prayer and peace, to make way for great and fair houses, where men can

live their own lives, and forget those others who sought to hallow the ground and link earth with Heaven."

"I can tell you how the religious house came to be destroyed. Some great baron who won grants of land and honours from whatever French monarch was in power at that time—if we can ever get at definite dates we can find out who it was—came and took possession of St. Cecilia's island. It had a population of peasants and fisher-folks, one great castle of which this Baron took possession, and the Monastery buildings, upon which he soon cast covetous eyes. Perhaps it was his desire to possess this place which made him invent the stories which have been handed down. Perhaps there were abuses and corruptions, as in so many other such places which gave him excuse—though offered no extenuation—for his deed. Be that as it may, the people were turned against the monks. They began to say that unholy deeds of darkness went on within those walls. Whispers went abroad of secret rites that tended towards devil-worship. Then when the public feeling had been sufficiently stirred, the Baron and his men went forth from their castle; they drove the Brothers within their walls. They piled brushwood and great trees all about it, poured oil upon the mass, and set it on fire."

"Oh, Marcus! With the monks inside!"

"That is the story. Those were wild and lawless and barbarous days, Lenore, such as we hope and trust the world will not see again. Well, the monks and their building perished together in the flames. It is said that the Abbot was seen standing to the very last upon a battlemented tower lately erected. And some declare that he was seen spirited away in corporeal form—though whether by good or evil spirits tradition is divided—just before the tower fell in. The Baron started building up a castle for himself with the materials from the ruins; but just before he finished the structure, it was destroyed by fire in some fashion which never could be traced. Naturally it was rumoured that the Abbot had

not perished, but that he lived under the guardianship of spiritual beings, and that he was constantly seen at night haunting the scenes of his life, and that often he carried a smoking brand in his hand—to do as had been done before.”

Lenore listened breathlessly, her eyes bright with the feelings that these legends always aroused within her.

“But the little chapel, did you not say there was one? What about that?”

“Ah!—I had forgotten to tell you that. The monks of the earliest days had built the little chapel which stands to this day, and had dedicated it to St. Chrysostom. And the fire never touched it! Legend says that the Baron and his men did all they could to destroy it, but that the fire turned each time upon them, driving them away, and leaving the chapel and its cloister unsinged by the flames. And there it remains. There it stood alone on the hill after the Baron had abandoned his attempt to erect a castle. And then the legend goes that a holy hermit came and established himself in a fragment of the cloister, where two or three little chambers still remain—I have something to say about that in a minute—and offered Mass daily in the little chapel, and kept the hours of the Church and went to and fro amongst the poor and sick, and spent hours of vigil and days of fasting and prayer amongst the blackened ruins of monastery and castle. And after him other holy hermits did the like, till the evil spell woven round the place was lifted. And later on, when conditions of life in the world had greatly changed, and a French noble built himself a house and laid out a garden on the Monastery Hill, nothing tragic followed. To be sure, no owner seemed to remain long in the house. It changed hands often, each owner doing something to beautify it, but without settling long. Perhaps the life of the island was too small and narrow. Often the house seems to have stood empty for long. It had done so when I bought it, with its plenishings just as it stood. It took my fancy for its

possibilities, and I had a thought of asking your father to live in it when I had finished the work I wished to do. Now I am realizing my dream in a slightly different way. Lenore, I think you will be happy in that house of yours, with its little chapel and cloistered walk. And you will wait there for my coming. You will think of me every day . . .”

“And pray for you, dear Marcus, in that little chapel. Oh! I hope there will be some good priest there, who will say Mass and hallow the place for us . . .”

“There is a saintly old man, the Abbé Quirin, or Father Augustin as the people call him, who serves the little chapel for the pure love of it. And that brings me to what I was going to say about that little fragment of some ancient building which once was part of the monastery and escaped the fire.”

“Yes, Marcus, what about that little bit of building? Is it used for anything?”

“That is what I want to explain. It was this way. On my second visit to the island to see how things were going there, when I began to know the place a little better, I heard from the Abbé Quirin of three nuns, who had been driven from France when the religious orders were dissolved and scattered, and who had fled here for shelter. They were almost starving, unwilling to return to secular life, unable to maintain themselves except by poorly paid menial tasks such as their need forced upon them.”

“Oh, poor things!” spoke Lenore in swift sympathetic distress. “It was wicked to drive them forth like that! Marcus, were you able to help them? Oh, how good to hear!”

“I gave them shelter in the little rooms close to the chapel on my hill. They are tending the herb garden for me, growing medicinal plants and helping the peasants who come to them for their aid. Father Augustin sees to it that they have what they need. And they keep their hours in the chapel, and he says daily Mass

there for them, and I think they are finding happiness and peace after what they have been through."

Lenore's eyes were shining with a lovely light. Her hands were clasped.

"Oh, Marcus! And I shall find them there! And we will all of us pray for you every day! They will love you for your goodness, as I do . . ."

He would not let her thank or praise him; but he had her interest fully aroused.

"It will be a beautiful life, Marcus. You have made me very happy. I shall not fear anything from the stories about the house now. Everything will be hallowed and blessed for me, I am sure."

"I would not send you there if I believed there was anything to fear. You will hear whispers, of course, of hauntings and strange happenings. But I can verify nothing that need trouble you. And these saintly women will be at hand and the good old priest. And at any time you have but to send me a cable summons, and I shall come to you from the ends of the earth."

She looked at him very sweetly.

"I shall think of you always, and want you often, Marcus; but I shall not send for you, because I know that you will come as soon as you are able. A wife must be a help and not a hindrance to her husband."

* * * * *

A few days later, at the little old church standing within the parklands of Heristal Castle, a very quiet wedding took place in the early hours of the morning.

Outside the lych-gate a high-power motor-car waited, and bride and groom entered it, with Nurse Frome in front. The luggage had all been strapped on beforehand, and through the misty sunny land the travelling party were whirled away through the smiling English lanes towards the great port of the south, where vessels rode proudly at anchor; and the wharfsides were alive with the busy traffic of men who go down to the sea in ships.

Lenore had sat very silent through this journey, her

hand holding fast to that of Marcus, her eyes from time to time seeking his face.

Generally his were turned to her in swift response. He was feeling like a man in a dream. His heart's desire had been granted ; but Lenore was going from him.

The fine steam yacht was awaiting them, ready for the start as soon as her passengers were on board. Marcus interviewed the skipper and steward, saw that every arrangement had been made for the comfort of his bride, and then went in search of Lenore.

His boat awaited him, and he could not linger. In a way he wished the last words spoken, for it was hurting him more to leave Lenore than even he had allowed for.

Also some ominous words he had heard spoken in German upon the quay had hit him shrewdly, he scarcely knew why ; for German bluff and German hate were all too common to the seasoned traveller of that day.

"*Der Tag*," had been the watchword, followed by some guttural speech. "It should have been last year, according to plan ; but now it will be this year—what use to wait ? The Fatherland is ready. Why give the pig-dogs more time ? This year for certain !"

Marcus sought and found Lenore, and in his ears the words were ringing still. This year !—this year ! Well, if trouble were coming perhaps she could not be better placed in an asylum of safety so little known, so far beyond the reach of strife.

He put his arms gently round her as she stood, and she lifted her pure sweet face to his. Her soft eyes held a glint of tears, but her voice was steady.

"I am very happy, Marcus, in the thought that you are my husband—that I am your wife. Marcus, I shall pray every day to be worthy of that honour."

He strained her for a moment to his heart. His lips sought hers. He kissed her with passionate fervour.

"Good-bye, my wife, good-bye."

"Not good-bye, Marcus," she said, "just au revoir !"

CHAPTER IV

LA MAISON DES SONGES

THAT was the name by which it had come to be called by the people of the sunny island of St. Cecilia. It was a great white house, standing back from the Plage, and hidden away in its own extensive and beautiful gardens, where warm lights brooded and soft shadows slept, and where there was so much shelter from all rough winds, and so bland and soft an atmosphere of golden sunshine lay tenderly upon it through the greater part of the year, that what were practically almost sub-tropical conditions ruled there. Tall trees bore wonderful blossoms according to season, whilst for the greater portion of the year the breath of roses, heliotrope and jessamine filled the air, and every wall was draped in beauty which knew little diminution through the changes of the soft seasons.

The house itself was a beautiful white building, built after the Moorish fashion, with arches and pillars, arcaded courts and great rooms divided off by fretted screens, full of the treasures which the Marquises of De Québriac had been wont to collect upon their travels. Once these treasures had been stored in a castle bearing their name in one of the fairest spots of the French Midi. But in the Terror the family had fled, taking with them all that was possible of their possessions. For a while they had found shelter in the great house upon the hill, the Maison Monastère, which they found standing empty on their arrival at the island of which they had been told. But they had not been happy there. They could not settle, and after they had been able to recover a portion of their fortune from the general wreck, they had bought and gradually added to the Maison Morisco, as it had then been called, though little by little this name had been dropped, and now the place was seldom spoken of save as the house of dreams.

Dreamy indeed it looked in the soft shining of a spring evening, as the sun was sinking in the west, bathing the world in a golden light, creating the illusion in the mind of a white-haired watcher of some magic vessel drifting silently and softly along towards a golden glory infinitely radiant and desirable.

Madame la Marquise de Québriac sat enthroned upon the marble terrace, arcaded over, which faced the west. The soft breeze wafted towards her the scent from hidden violet beds and brought smiles to her lips.

She was a very beautiful, stately woman, looking, with her snow-white hair and her peculiarly dignified and remote aspect, almost more than her three-score years. And yet the texture of her fine-grained skin was as flawless as in her youth, although the relentless tools of time and sorrow had graven suggestive lines upon the proudly handsome face. It was a face which in repose looked sad almost to sternness, although it could light up with an infinite charm. She always dressed beautifully in soft silken fabrics of grey or mauve, with quantities of delicate old lace about her throat and wrists, and shadowing the purity of her white hair.

The hush of eventide was around and about her as she sat with a journal upon her lap and her strange deep grey-blue eyes gazing out straight before her. She seemed lost in a dream of her own, shut in, as it were, to her own musings. And yet, as sweet melodious sounds stole out upon her from within the house, a smile of tenderest significance dawned in her eyes and slowly illumined all her face. It was the notes from an organ that reached her, deep and grand and full of majesty. Some one within was playing an old choral, the tones of which stirred the heart, whilst in the melody was something which seemed to soar and soar towards the gates of Heaven itself. The Marquise folded her hands together, and as she listened a great yearning shone out of her eyes.

“My Lucien,” she whispered, “my Lucien! Ah, but

when he plays like that it presses my very heart ! It is as though he longed to follow the sounds which he creates—to the very doors of Paradise ! ”

Presently the notes of the organ ceased, and a few moments later a gentle tread, just a little uneven, sounded within the house. The Marquise turned her head, and her eyes took a beautiful shining as her first-born son stepped forth from the long window, and greeted her with a smile, and a gentle salute upon the brow.

“ *Ma chère petite mère !* ” he said in his low, melodious voice.

It was only a caressing figure of speech, for the Marquise was a woman of stately stature, almost equal to that of her tall son. He was a man of five-and-twenty summers, with her beautiful refined features, just a little more hollowed and etherealized. He had the dark eyes of the De Québriacs, and their rather dark colouring ; but from his mother he borrowed many of the traits of charm which characterized her personality. His face was clean-shaven, and his clothes were of English cut and make. In that house English was spoken as readily and easily as French. For the Marquise was by birth a daughter of a South Carolina family, and she had brought up both her children to speak each language with equal fluency.

Her heart-strings were deeply twined about this son of hers. His splendid boyhood had passed without a cloud. Health and spirits and perfection of form had been his in full measure. Then had come a day when he and his younger brother Leon had gone riding together towards the back of the island. But from that expedition Lucien had been carried home to her suffering from grave injuries. And from that day he had never recovered full health or strength, and always he walked slowly, generally with a stick in his hand, whilst in spite of his affirmations of perfect recovery, there was a look about him which never let his mother's heart fully rest.

One element of tragedy lay in the fact that Leon, the second son, took to himself much of the blame of the

accident, and laid at his own door the load which his brother had to bear. His account had been brief yet succinct.

"I leapt the gorge of the devil's kitchen. I dared Lucien to follow me. He had tried to hold me back. He said the risk was too great. But I did it—and jeered at him for hesitating. Then, like a fool, I whistled. You know that our horses always respond when we do that. Before Lucien knew what was happening Pegasus had plunged forward and taken the bound. But his hind hoofs slipped on the rocks, he did not get the right grip—and he plunged down into the gulf—horribly—with Lucien on his back. We found them at the bottom together. Lucien was not dead. But the fault is mine, mine, mine. Oh, my brother—my brother!"

Ten years had passed since that tragic day, and Lucien seldom thought and never spoke of it. He was now the Marquis of Québriac, his father having died when he was eighteen. He and his mother lived together in the dream-like house, which to him was extremely dear; and Leon, a gallant officer in the French Army, paid them visits as occasion permitted, and brought light and sunshine into the quiet home when he appeared. The brothers, little more than a year apart in age, had always been tenderly attached, and after the accident, Leon's devotion to his senior had been like an obsession. It had been needful to send him to France to finish his education and for his military training; yet even now when at home, he shadowed his brother to a degree that brought smiles to many faces.

To the mother, the deep attachment of her sons alike to herself and each other was the chiefest joy of her life.

"That was a beautiful *motif* which you played just now, my son," spoke the Marquise. "Another of your own compositions? Uplifting—yet how solemn!"

"Yes, mother mine, as I feel the times to be. Since these last letters of Leon's have come, I have the presage of a great shadow approaching us. How to say it I

know not. But it is as though the world should be holding its breath in solemnity and expectation ; whereas, as we know, it is plunged in a mad vortex of pleasure and excitement. Its very churches stand empty and ruinous. In many districts of our land the voice of prayer and praise has ceased to ascend. . . .”

The Marquise folded her lips in an expression well known to her son. Lucien had long since grown into the knowledge that his mother had for a great while now forgotten the faith of her childhood. His father had been an intellectual, whose mind ranged into wide fields of speculative thought, in which the traditions of his youth and the barriers imposed by them went down as straw before fire. The dogmas of the Church were to him as tinkling brass, pious inventions and follies, fit only as swaddling bands for babes, from which men freed themselves by natural right. And his wife had followed his lead. She occasionally attended Mass as a pure matter of form. Her sons had received some religious instruction, as even their father decided that it was fair that both sides should be presented to them. St. Cecilia's island owned a stately church, served by a stately ecclesiastic, who held Madame la Marquise in great respect and esteem. He had himself given some instruction to her sons ; but he had not won their affections. Lucien was by nature of a devout temperament ; but had found little pleasure in religious exercises. Music had always been his passion from childhood. A Mass with organ playing and chanting would carry him up into heavenly regions where his spirit found liberty and delight. But books of devotion had small attraction for him, and the silent influence of his mother drew him away from ordinances, whilst his soul seemed to find its objective when the pinions of harmony bore him upwards into celestial regions of beauty ; and where he often felt that he found a temple not made with hands, wherein dwelt a Presence that to him was as the Spirit of God. When his brother was absent, he seemed to live in

some distant sanctuary which his own great gift could create about him ; and there he worshipped after a fashion of his own, seeing visions and dreaming dreams.

So this House of Dreams seemed a suitable setting for his life, and he had long ceased to rebel against the knowledge that he could not go out into the great world beyond, or enter into its maelstrom of futile activities.

His mother looked at him with tender eyes of questioning comprehension. She often felt deep gratitude that this son of hers was so wrapped up in his music and his dreams. For she knew well that with another bias he might easily have accepted the religious life, and have secluded himself behind the walls of some monastic building.

"It is almost time we heard again from Leon. Did not a boat come in to-day ?"

"One was expected ; but it had not arrived at noon. Perhaps before night . . ." He stopped short, turning his head. His mother had heard nothing ; but into Lucien's eyes there leaped a great light. There was a joyous ring in the voice which exclaimed,

"It is Leon's step ! He is coming himself—he is here ! Mother, it will be no letter this time—Leon himself is with us !"

Next moment he appeared ! A gallant figure in his gay uniform—as tall as his brother and as handsome ; but with bronzed skin, finely knit frame, golden-hazel eyes full of light, and a head of silky dark hair with a crisp curl in it, matching in colour the jaunty little moustache which adorned his upper lip.

"Maman—maman !" he cried, as French boys so often do even after they have left behind their real boyhood. He flung himself on his knees before her. He kissed both her hands before lifting his lips for her salute ; and when released from her embrace, he sprang up and took his brother in his arms, kissing him, foreign fashion, upon both cheeks, as had been their custom in meeting or parting from their early years.

"Leon, but what happy surprise ! My son, but thou

art welcome indeed! Thou hadst not told us of this happiness in store for us! Ah, but it is joy to see thy gay face! Now seat thyself here at my feet, and tell us the news of the great world!"

He obeyed with careless grace, holding her hand, looking into her face and that of his brother, and talking fast and fluently, sometimes in French, sometimes in English, giving his budget of personal information, and asking a thousand questions from them.

Later they sat happily together in a beautiful room, where family portraits looked down upon them as they gathered round the shining polished table, gay with piles of fruit and gorgeous flowers from the great glass houses; and as the evening was so mild and moonlit, they afterwards took coffee upon the terrace, where the tall white pillars were magically touched with gold and rose from the shaded lamps, and the long sprays of the wistaria swayed dreamily in the silver moonlight beyond. Leon drew in deep breaths of dew-laden air.

Gay as the young soldier showed himself at the first, later on he would fall into musing trance, gazing out before him with unseeing eyes. Lucien, who followed his every look and word with deep affection and sympathy, put a tentative word.

"Is there something wrong, my brother? What have you on your mind beneath its gaiety? Your letters have showed—something—a misgiving. . . ."

"Yes; every month accentuates that misgiving. Maman, Lucien—it is coming—it is coming quickly. The German Kaiser—mad dog of Europe, as he is often called—has decreed it. He will quickly start forth on his mad career—his bid for world domination—and France will be his first objective! It will be war—almost without a declaration."

"Leon! Is it possible?"

"You will see. We know, we feel it in the air. Our secret service knows it." Then he stopped suddenly short. He flung out his hand towards the moonlit

night ; and his face was irradiated by a smile gay and debonair—which made him a boy again.

“ But to think of such things upon a night like this—it is a *bêtise* ! Away with care—away with gloomy thoughts ! I have come home to you and to Maman ! And, oh yes—it is most interesting this piece of news ! As we came to our moorings there was an English yacht—but a yacht !—making her way to the quay side. Before I left I heard the news. That English milord who has made purchase of the Monastery House on the hill has sent his young wife there for her health. Later he will join her himself. So we shall have a neighbour there for the summer. Maman, that should interest you ! And they say she is young and lovely, too ! Quel dommage that she is his wife ! Had she only been his lovely daughter ! But there she is ! How interesting ! ”

CHAPTER V

LA MAISON MONASTÈRE

“ **A** H, but how beautiful ! ” exclaimed Lady Heristal. “ For sure it is a pretty place,” was Nurse Frome’s rejoinder. “ But it’s a bit more monkish still to what I expected, seeing the old monastery was burnt and demolished. Don’t I seem to see the old fellows prowling about under those pillared walks with their books and their beads ? ”

But Lenore scarcely heard. Her eyes were fixed upon what lay before and around them, and Nurse Frome soon bustled away to see to the unpacking of the baggage, and to the setting in order of the rooms they were to occupy in the stately pile.

Lenore remained where she was. She seemed to be drinking in the tender beauty and gentle austerity of her surroundings. She was in the courtyard of her home.

On three sides mellow ancient walls, of a dim golden colour due to the spread of lichen and stonecrop over hoary grey stone, rose up round her. For the house was built in quadrangular formation, only that the fourth side lay open to the west, two wings to north and south jutting out from the original massive structure, the long windows of which looked towards the sunset on the one side, whilst the back of the building faced the east, and formed the back wall of the ancient cloister which Lenore had not so far seen.

At this moment the glow of the sunset quivered overhead, and filled the place where she stood. The old golden walls were about her, and for a moment the illusion suggested itself that they formed a golden chalice filled to the brim with crimson wine, and that this chalice was elevated towards the shining heavens—an offering and oblation and act of thanksgiving.

Opposite and trending downwards lay a mystery of gardens, trees fired by the western light, flowers glimmering softly through the network of level lights and flickering shadows. There were yew trees and tall box borders, and a long alley which led to what once had been the monks' orchard. And away in the west the sunset was burning, whilst a little to the right a mass of purple mountains lifted itself solemnly against the glowing sky.

The glimmer of the sea could be seen from here. It lay like a shield of opal, fired to rose and amethyst as it melted into the changing hues of the sky. In the air was the taste which comes down from mountain heights, pine trees and dancing waters, and the aromatic scents from the garden. And it seemed also to Lenore as though the old sun-soaked walls gave off the scents of past ages—as though sights and sounds and scents which had been absorbed into the very structure of the building, through the long dim ages of the past, now exuded the atmosphere of that strange solemn past, which lay like a spell upon those who came after. Would it prove to be a spell for evil or for good?

Long she stood at gaze, drinking in the beauty, and striving to assimilate something of the inner meaning which must surely dwell about all ancient buildings that have seen such great vicissitudes as had this ancient pile. Even the house which had risen upon the ruins of the first foundation was three centuries old. It seemed almost as though, whatever had been the original conception of the builders of the dwelling-house, some compulsion had wrought within them to keep more or less to the former lines of architectural construction. So that this courtyard, laid out with marble pavings, formal flower beds with stone copings, trees in stone jars and formal walks with stone seats set at convenient angles, was flanked on three sides by cloistered walks upon which the long windows of the house opened. Not cloisters in any true sense of the word; yet bearing something of that aspect, which the luxuriant growth of climbing creeper, soon to be a glory of blended colours, could by no means entirely disguise.

The open side of the quadrangle gave upon a wide stone-flagged terrace. Lenore stepped out upon this and saw that it led round the house, and was diversified by shrubs and flowering plants in great stone vases, and by statues set at intervals between them. The stonecrop and lichen had woven over this terrace the same golden hue as the walls, and the warm sunlight lay soft and level over all, lighting up the windows of the house with dazzling brilliance.

A great mass of ilex and cypress trees shut off the end of the south terrace, and when she threaded her way amongst them, she came upon a little enclosure formed by low grey walls, which she instinctively knew must have been the burying ground of the old monks.

And just abutting upon the place of ancient graves into which it led, was the old cloister of which she had heard. How solemn it looked in the failing light—and how old! As her feet trod its flags, she felt as though shadowy forms were walking there. She seemed to feel

the impalpable touch of long garments, and to catch the whispers as of men passing to and fro and telling their beads, or softly whispering their devotions. To her right, as she walked, was a green space with flag-stones laid at intervals. She guessed that beside this cloister the Priors or Abbots had been laid to rest, whilst the graves of the Brothers were crowded more closely together in the little burying ground beyond. And this green space was bounded on the other side by a hoary stone wall, pierced by an archway in which, deeply sunk, was an ancient door. The embrasure was so black with shadow that she could not see whether the door was fast shut or not. She almost fancied it stood half-open; but was unable to make sure.

Lenore walked the whole length of the cloistered way, and saw that at its end it turned to the right, and that beneath a much narrower fragment of cloistral arcade she could reach the wall in which the door was set. She walked softly, with a certain hesitation, for the light was fading fast; and now she was more and more conscious of those whispering voices which had seemed about her from the first, so soon as she had left behind the sunset glow and had plunged into the shadows of the days which were no more.

Then, as she stood hesitating, some impulse prompted her to step towards that shadowy archway, and next moment she found herself slipping through a half-open door and into a tiny place, the very sight of which caused her to catch her breath suddenly.

It was the little chapel of which she had heard. Darkness lay within—velvet black, illumined only by one red lamp and by the white points of three candles, set in sconces beside three carved seats. And the whispering sounds she had heard came from three black-robed, white-coifed nuns, who knelt upright with folded hands which looked like wax, and murmured their litanies and prayers without pause or break.

There was an altar opposite the door; an altar with

an embroidered cloth that glistened now and then in the flicker of the candles. Above was an image of the Virgin Mother with her Child ; and in a niche hard by that of some saint—probably St. Chrysostom.

Lenore knelt down upon the stones and made the holy sign. Back over her memory rushed the remembrances of her childhood's days with the Sisters of the convent ; of her girlhood amongst the Sisters of the Anglican community, whose rules and ways seemed always so familiar and so dear. How sweet to find here—so far away from most familiar things, these sacred associations linking up present and past ! It was good to have found this little place within an hour of her arrival. Good to feel the crowding influences and impulses which had inspired the prayers and the vows of the place's devotees through long ages of time ! They had not been faithless and wicked, those Brethren ; she would not believe it. Here was a place for prayer and praise. Here she would find peace for her soul and shelter from all harmful thoughts or fears.

A sound of sweeping garments aroused her. She lifted her head to see that a tall figure in black raiment, followed by two nuns of lesser stature habited in grey, were filing from their seats, and about to approach the door by which she knelt.

Lenore rose swiftly and silently, and held it open for them to pass through. Then she followed them, and in the clearer light without—though the twilight was fast deepening—found herself face to face with the nuns of whom Marcus had told her.

Very sweetly she told them who she was and why she was there. They listened with much of interest, much of sympathy. All of them had sincerest gratitude to express to Lady Heristal concerning their debt to her husband. He had found them in direst want, and had placed them out of all fear of future penury. He had given them a home—would Madame so far condescend as to come and see it ? It lay not a stone's throw distant.

Lenore followed them with great content. They skirted the chapel wall, turned an angle, and at once found themselves in a tiny enclosure, which had been easily transformed into a humble little dwelling-house of a few cell-like rooms, where these three gentle-faced women dwelt apart, doing their own work, cooking their own frugal meals; and dividing the rest of their time between keeping the Church's hours in the little chapel, and gathering, drying and preparing the medicinal herbs which grew in the gardens, and which the pharmacies of the town would purchase from them in any quantities they were able to furnish.

Eagerly Lenore listened to their simple tale. She spoke French almost as easily as her native tongue, and seemed not like a foreigner to the gentle Sisters. They were not a little interested and excited by her news. Had she come to dwell amongst them? Would Monsieur follow her quickly? Would the Maison Monastère be their future home? But what happiness, what joy if indeed it were so! She explained that her husband's duties would tie him a good deal to England; but that he had settled this island property upon her; and that she was to live here without him for a while, whilst her health grew strong.

"Will Madame be happy in that house?" the Reverend Mother asked, looking at her with a certain grave solicitude. The two Sisters also seemed to press a little nearer to Lenore, gazing at her with gentle, ruminant eyes, as though their thoughts outstripped their powers of expression.

"Why should I not?" asked Lenore swiftly.

"Truly, why not? It is a fair house, and full of beautiful things I have heard."

"Have you never been inside, Reverend Mother?" asked Lenore surprised.

"No, my child. I have never entered its doors. Our place is here."

"But you will come and see me there now that it is my home?—you and the Sisters?"

"Perhaps, my child, perhaps. As to that we need not speak as yet. We have full liberty. We, alas, live now beneath no rule save that of our own making. We have been through cruel times. But here we have found a haven of peace. How little I ever guessed where that asylum would be found! Here upon this hill, where so many and such terrible happenings have taken place! My child, I trust that you have been well advised in coming here! For many have come before you, who have not cared to remain."

Lenore looked earnestly into the fine face bent gravely upon her.

"I know," she said, "my husband told me that. I have been wondering much about it. Once it all belonged to the Church. Now it has been taken away. Sometimes in my country, houses which have been snatched away like that seem to have a curse upon them. One hears strange stories. Do you mean that it is so here?"

"My child, who can say? Evil deeds of darkness have indeed been perpetrated upon this hill. And from my childhood I have heard strange stories concerning it. But of the truth of them I have no proof. Yet from this fact there is no getting away; since the monastery was burned and the great house built up upon the same foundations, none have ever long remained within its walls. It has changed owners countless times; and none amongst those owners ever remained there long. Many went hastily. Yet all went. But the good God alone knows what it all means. Let us not seek to judge or to condemn."

Lenore listened with a sense of growing fascination. It was not fear for herself. She had indeed no thought of self at all in the matter. But a burning question forced itself to her lips. She wanted so much to feel sure.

"Reverend Mother, the Brothers who lived here before the monastery was built—they were good and holy men, were they not? There was no evil amongst them?"

Lenore met the earnest gaze of eyes as deep and dark as water on a moonless night.

"My daughter, who can say? Evil is present too often even amongst holy things. Another time I will tell you more of these matters. Now you must be gone, for the night is at hand. God and our Lady have you safe in their holy keeping. Then all will be well."

CHAPTER VI

A DREAM WORLD

LENORE loved her golden-walled house and its ancient gardens. The throb of spring-tide was in the air, and already the beat of the sunlight upon the pavements was hot almost to fierceness in the middle of the day. But in the gardens there was always shade.

Lenore spent long dreamy hours in that garden, learning its secrets, inhaling its subtle fragrances. It took her long before she could be certain of finding her way to any given spot by the most direct path. For when the long formal paved walks and alleys with their glowing parterres of colour had been passed, she plunged into regions of mystery and dimness, diversified by small miracles of beauty—little walled enclosures where lilies of the valley grew so thickly that the foot pressed them to earth in passing, old statues or fragments of masonry, against which violets clustered in profusion, welcoming her with fragrant breath.

And never did she wander far without meeting some aromatic waft of scent from the herb garden. And that garden grew very dear to her.

Sister Perdita was continually to be found amongst the herbs, which according to season bloomed, seeded, faded, or renewed themselves. The Reverend Mother had learned much of herb-lore in her youth; and now

it was Sister Perdita, helped when possible by Sister Eulalie, the compounder of healing medicines, who made practical use of this store of knowledge, and worked with a deep contentment amongst the aromatic denizens of the old monks' garden.

Lenore was in the herb garden when a message reached her that Madame la Marquise de Québriac awaited her in the great salon, hoping that Lady Heristal would receive her.

Lenore hastened back to her house.

When she entered the long salon, where beautiful old furniture stood reflected on the shining floor, and great flowering plants shed perfume all around, she saw a very stately figure enthroned in a chair which might once have graced a palace ; and she felt that she was in the presence of royalty itself.

With graceful simplicity she greeted her visitor, whose name she knew. They sat together in the shaded radiance of the afternoon, and Lenore's dark eyes kindled with the admiration which she felt for her stately guest.

The Marquise explained that she had wished to give a welcome to Lord Heristal's young wife, and knew that in the land from which she came this was the custom. Lenore thanked her with prettily chosen words, and over the tea-table which was carried in, the two advanced by easy stages upon the road of acquaintanceship, whose goal is the shining land of friendship.

"Yes, I love the house already," spoke Lenore, in response to some question, "I heard of it from my husband before our marriage—just after he had bought it ; and even then I was drawn in fancy towards it. It had stood empty a great while before my husband bought it."

"That is truth, my child. It always stands empty for long between the brief terms of its occupation. Long ago, more than a century now, one of my husband's ancestors, the Marquis de Québriac, who was driven from France in the Terror, found an asylum in this fair island, and sought to make a home here in this house. But

before the negotiation for sale had accomplished itself, his mind had changed. He remained here only for one year, whilst he began to build the house below where his descendants have dwelt ever since. He would not purchase this place. I wonder if your husband has ever told you why it is that he did so."

"My husband has bought many properties. It was the fancy of his father first, and afterwards his, to buy, improve and sell again. That was before he became Lord Heristal. But when he bought this one and told me of it, he thought that I was interested—and I was. And now it is mine—and already I feel a great and growing love for it. You see for long from these old walls prayers and intercessions went continually up to Heaven. I feel as though the very stones have in some way beyond our understanding absorbed the spirit of that ceaseless worship. Is it folly that I speak and think so? Honoured Madame, do you, a little, understand?"

In the eyes of the stately Marquise shone a light that was at once tender and compassionate.

"As to that, my child, I dare not fully say. Within my breast are stored the accumulated experiences and musings of two generations. I have known my moments of rapture, when Heaven's gates are wide flung before our eyes, and the incense cloud rises lifting our hearts into celestial regions. But the doors close upon us later. And we find ourselves shut out into this world below. . . ."

"Ah, surely, not altogether, dear Madame! The golden gates shine always before us. It is not only a hope for the young. The path of the just shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Ah! pardon me, Madame la Marquise, if I speak too boldly. Yet I feel as I look into your face, that your feet are on that shining way."

The smile with which these words were received was not to be interpreted by Lenore.

"Perhaps, my child, these are different goals towards which shining paths may lead. And it may be in the

great hereafter that we shall better understand than now to what end our feet have been set within the maze we have to tread. But enough of such too grave talk in one so young and fair ! See now, my carriage stands at your gates. Will you so far give pleasure to an old new friend as to let her carry you away with her, to make known to you her two tall sons, who have spoken many times of the lady of the Maison Monastère ? ”

“ But I should love it ! ” said Lenore with eager eyes. “ May I send for my hat and wrap—and then indeed I should love to come ! ”

Lenore gazed eagerly about her as the carriage wound its way round the curves of the well-made roads. She had not been outside her gates as yet ; for on Sunday an aged priest had celebrated Mass in the little chapel, and she had attended there, and had enjoyed a conversation afterwards with the old man, which had left a very peaceful memory behind.

As the carriage rolled through the great gates of the Marquise’s house she looked about her with vivid interest, and uttered little exclamations of delight. But it was as she stepped within the house itself that her face changed. A wonderful volume of sound streamed out and seemed to envelop them in its waves.

“ It is my son who plays upon his organ,” spoke the Marquise. “ Come, my little one, let us go together to find him.”

The organ room opened by great double doors from the main entrance hall. It was a place of shining emptiness—a huge circular room, in its midst a grand piano, at its farther end the magnificent organ, at which a player sat with his back to them, whilst a tall soldier lay extended in a deep arm-chair, his head thrown back and his eyes fixed on the vaulted ceiling. Neither had been aware of the opening of the door ; and the great reverberating harmonies pealed on and on, till in an unexpected pause the voice of the player spoke—“ This is my Gloria in Excelsis, Leon. Listen, and try to fix

the words as it proceeds. Ah, if only I had a clear full soprano—as in my dreams—to sing it!”

Again came the reverberating notes of the organ. And then . . . Lenore made one forward step; it was as though she acted upon some hidden compulsion. At a certain point, after a pregnant lull, as the clear vibrantly sweet organ notes pealed forth again, she lifted her voice, as though like the skylark she winged her way to the gates of Heaven—and she sang:

“Gloria in excelsis Deo. Et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis.”

At that sudden sound, piercingly sweet, true and full and rounded, Leon sprang to his feet and wheeled round. His mother lifted her hand in a gesture that he instinctively obeyed, his eyes turning from his mother's face to that of Lenore, lifted upwards, as though in a vision, and then again towards his brother, whose playing became as that of a man entranced. Only for one second, as the first fluting notes arose, had he half turned his head. Now he played on and on, with hands which seemed inspired. And the clear voice rang through the vaulted space above them, and seemed to rain down golden drops of sound. And so through the tender throbbing passages of pleading to the glorious triumphant finale:

“Tu solus Dominus. To solus altissimus, Jesu Christe. Cum Sancto Spiritu, in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.”

As the last notes died away into a reverberating silence, Lucien swung round upon his bench, and stood up. With both hands outstretched he came towards Lenore, who still stood with her arm resting upon the closed piano-forte, looking yet as though she dreamed.

“Now I have heard the angel-voice of my dreams!”

The Marquise, tall, stately, smiling, stood between them.

“Lucien, I have brought Lady Heristal back with me. I wish to introduce you. And you also, my Leon. Lady Heristal, let me now present my big sons to you in due order and with fitting ceremony. This one is Lucien,

Marquis of Québriac. And this my soldier son, Captain Leon, of the Hussars. Both at your feet, as you very well see ! ”

There was no doubt as to that. Lenore's fresh young beauty, of so tender and ethereal a type, made instant impression upon the sons of the Marquise, whose training had been such as to inspire them with a reverence for womanhood which in these modern days it was not always easy to feel.

“ But indeed you are too good,” she told Lucien, “ for I have had little training. Though when I lived amongst nuns and Sisters, and we spent many, many happy hours in the chapel they liked to hear me sing. And it was my great joy. I can only sing church music. I have no knowledge of anything else. But in a place like this—and to such an organ as yours when you play it—ah !—I feel that I could sing on and on, as surely one day we may hope to do in Heaven ! ”

“ But is she not herself an angel, Maman ? ” spoke Leon to his mother as they watched from a distance the pair beside the organ. “ And see, it will be good for him that she comes often to listen to his playing. He is all in a dream now. Every time I see him the dream seems deeper, but he must not live all his life in a dream. Maman, is it not strange that a bride should come here without her husband ? What is the matter with the man that he should leave his wife almost on the marriage day ? ”

The Marquise, with her hand upon the arm of her younger son, led him out into the garden arcade, smiling, yet thoughtful.

“ She has told me something of her story. The marriage was hastened on through the death of her father, when Lord Heristal's arrangements for a business journey were all made and could not be postponed. Her health was too frail for her to bear the fatigues of accompanying him, so he sent her here, and will join her in a few months' time. I gather that they were married only a few hours

before the parting. She speaks almost as a child, yet with an awakening heart of womanhood. I am glad of that voice! It will be good for Lucien to be roused somewhat from his dream."

"If she were not married she might have realized his dream. Maman, I want for Lucien to wed. It is his son who should carry on the old name. I am a soldier. I may fall in Algeria one of these days—or . . . Lucien should marry."

At that moment an interruption came. Through an avenue of greenery two figures might be seen approaching. A man—a girl. Leon sprang forward—a laugh ringing out into the scented air.

"Why, here is our anchorite—our great and beloved Dr. Rodin! And what this vision of youth and beauty beside him! Surely my dazzled eyes do not deceive me! Of a truth it is—only grown and developed and become very glorious—our goddess Diana!"

CHAPTER VII

THE RODINS

FATHER and daughter were beside them in a few moments. The man was spare, not tall, with an air of extreme alertness, and eyes of a peculiarly penetrating calibre. His mobile face was clean-shaven, and might have belonged as well to an English as a Frenchman.

His daughter was just a little taller than himself, and she carried herself with the grace of a gallant boy—upright as a young poplar—the radiance of glowing youth encircling her; her eyes, a bewildering mixture of hazel lights and violet shadows, shining with happiness and *espièglerie*, her dark hair curling deliciously beneath the brim of her wide burnt straw hat. She made a

little rush at the last upon the Marquise, dropped a reverence of indescribable grace. and kissed her hands, only to be folded later in arms which held her tenderly, whilst a voice spoke in melodious accents :

“Thou art welcome as flowers after the winter rains, my child ! When didst thou arrive ? We had no word as to when the travellers were to return.”

By this time Diana was permitting herself to be greeted with gay camaraderies by Leon, whilst her father approached the Marquise with his salutation upon her hand and words betokening long-standing friendship upon his lips.

“Ah, but we have had a heavenly time,” the girl was telling Leon, her bright eyes dwelling on his face with a frankly winning eagerness. “First Daddy fetched me from Devonshire, where I had been two years on and off, finishing the education they like you to go on with after you have to quit school. Then he took me off in the *Artemis*—and we have sailed along the coasts of Tunis and Algeria. We have dreamed away lovely weeks amongst the Ægean islands. I have seen Athens and the Acropolis, I have visited Crete and Candia, Corfu and Malta. Now I have come home to take care of Daddy, and make a life of my own. Oh, Leon—who is that ?”

For at this moment Lucien appeared, walking beside Lenore, and Diana’s gaze fastened upon the beautiful stranger with a quick intensity of interest.

Explanations were quick to follow, and the Rodins were duly presented to Lady Heristal, whose gentle graciousness and charm made a delightful impression. Diana quickly made out that she was slightly the senior of the châtelaine of the Maison Monastère, and to her the thought of another English girl (even though a married woman) upon the island made great appeal.

Lenore was quickly learning who and what the Rodins were. He was French-Canadian by birth and descent, and had married an English wife. Her health had

failed disastrously when their only child was but four years old, and her husband, whose means were ample, and whose desire was to prosecute some line of scientific research in the leisure of somewhat isolated surroundings, settled himself in the island of St. Cecilia, where Diana had been brought up until her mother died, and she was sent to England for education.

Dr. Rodin's researches obliged him to travel; and he possessed a small but exceedingly seaworthy little craft of his own, of which he was skipper and sailing master, with a picked crew of island men, who would take his orders and go anywhere with him. He was known through Morocco, going where few white men would be safe, as fearlessly as he trod the streets of Paris or Quebec. His daughter had often been with him on his sea trips, though not much upon land, loving, above all things, to be her father's companion.

Servants handed Turkish coffee, fruit and sweetmeats, and presently the doctor came over to join the younger contingent. He soon addressed himself to Lenore.

"Madame la Marquise, like the true friend she is, has granted me the privilege of asking you a favour, Madame. I am on the way to the Maison Monastère; not to intrude, well understood, upon your privacy; but to talk herb-lore with the good Sister Eulalie, and ask her to make certain preparations for me, which her skill and patience enable her to do."

"Ah!—then you are the good doctor of whom she has spoken sometimes, whose generous payment for her time and pains brings much of relief to that little home where they have found refuge."

He spread out his hands in a gesture which was extremely French, though he spoke English without hesitation, and quite as rapidly as his native French.

"Ah, but it is I who am the debtor. Without her there is much that I should fail to accomplish. But to my favour. I came this way round to leave my daughter with our gracious Marquise, and she will find

her way home by the mule track later that she has trodden since childhood, and loves to follow. . . .”

“And for me, I go with her,” spoke Leon; and Diana turned upon him a joyously flushed face. “It will not be the first time we have trodden it together. We have been reared in the English tradition, we others, is it not so? You will trust her to me, Dr. Rodin?”

It was easily arranged. They all moved to the gate to see the equipage which Dr. Rodin had designed for his frail wife, and which he now used himself, driving all over the island behind his docile and very strong, sure-footed mules, often negotiating tracks which seemed little fitted for wheels, and taking mountain zig-zags with a fearlessness that spoke well alike for his skill and his nerve.

Lenore seated beside him was soon well on her way to her own home, her companion talking most interestingly as they moved swiftly onwards, only beginning to turn questioner as they breasted the steep incline.

“What think you, Madame, of the Maison Monastère, now that you have made trial of the life there for this space of time?”

“Truly I think that I grow to love it more and more every day that passes.”

“And you have not been—disturbed?”

“What should disturb me there? It is my own house—I have my own servants.”

“True, true, what should disturb or alarm you there, in your own home?”

Lenore turned her head slightly, and met a searching glance from the doctor's eyes. She took a sudden resolution and spoke to him, as more than once she had sought to speak to the Reverend Mother or one of the sisters—and somehow had failed to find the words.

“Dr. Rodin, I notice that every one speaks strangely about my house. Will you tell me why? I know that it was Church property once—and that the Monastery was burnt down, and an ordinary dwelling-house built up

on the site. And I know, too, that traditions often grow up round a place where these things have happened. Will you tell me what you know? Is there—or is there said to be—a curse resting upon the Maison Monastère? Please tell me the truth. I think I shall not be afraid. My husband sent me here to be happy and to get well and to wait for him. He would not have sent me to a house of which I need feel fear. I shall not be afraid.”

“And I think you need not be, Madame. I think that you have the strong spirit which is armed against danger. But others have sought to live where you live, and have not been able to remain—either not able or not willing. You have heard that, no doubt.”

“Yes; but nobody has seemed willing to tell me why. That is why I ask of you.”

“I am not sure that anybody can exactly tell you why. The fact is known; but so far as I can learn those who have tried to live there and have failed have all given different reasons—made different explanations. Yet investigations which I have had the curiosity to make have brought out this one point of similarity in the story told. The inmates use the expression that they ‘were not alone’ in the house—that they ‘could not have it to themselves.’ But who else inhabited it none of them appeared to have tried to tell. The great-grandfather of the Marquis de Québriac was one of those who tried the experiment. Lucien’s father remembers him, as he lived to a ripe old age. Lucien and the Marquise both heard strange things about the place; but no details. Only some haunting presence which would not let them rest. At the end of a year they came to their present house, and settled there. To them there is something slightly sinister about the Maison Monastère. And two families who tried to live there since they left did not remain longer. The place was sold to an Englishman lately—doubtless your husband—for a mere song; the house as it stood, I believe, with all

its plenishings. Yet there are some who say that he made a bad bargain notwithstanding. Am I frightening you, Madame? "

"No. Because of course I hear things myself, and I think about them a great deal. And though I am very wishful to know all the story, I am not frightened. The little chapel seems to stand sentinel close to us. Father Augustine says his daily Mass there. The good Sisters, under the direction of the Reverend Mother, keep their hours as far as may be. The incense cloud rises. Holy thoughts and prayers go up with the ascending smoke. No, I am not afraid."

The doctor nodded his head several times as though well pleased.

"That is what I thought. That is good. You have the temperament of the *dévoté*. You wear a shining armour different from that of which we hear something too much these days. And therefore it may very well happen that you will be let alone. You will be guarded."

"But from what? Will you please tell me? It interests me very much. Do you know the story of those old days when the monks lived at St. Chrysostom's Monastery? "

"I know a little. I surmise much more. I have built up a theory of my own. If you wish it you shall hear it. But remember it is most of it pure surmise."

"I wish above everything to hear it. I think I can promise not to be afraid."

"Good. Then you shall hear. Have you ever thought or believed or heard that places can be affected, can in some mysterious fashion bear the impress of the minds and the deeds of those who inhabit them? Or, put another way, can draw back to their sphere and retain there some—shall we call it for want of a better word?—some emanation belonging to the past, so that influences possibly baleful—more generally baleful—yet occasionally hallowed and holy—seem to gather about these spots, and to make themselves felt in a way which is

difficult to define, yet which is often easy to feel?"

"I do know what you mean—in measure. And I feel about my house, at least when I pace in its cloister and kneel in the little chapel, that there are gentle, holy presences about me there, which awaken great peace in my heart. Do I make you smile with my faith in these things?"

"If I smile, my dear lady, it is with satisfaction that you have this sense of protection. I myself am lacking in the mystic confidence of the good Catholic. Nevertheless, I am very well convinced that this material world is not all. What I would say to you is this. Without doubt in the past there were holy men dwelling upon that hill, whose lives were without reproach, whose souls soared to the very gates of Heaven. There are legends concerning them and their alms and oblations, their vigils and their prayers. And the fame of them spread, and others came to join them, and the place grew in size and in riches, until at last . . ."

"Ah, tell me, please! I love to think of those holy men of prayer . . ."

She paused, for the doctor was looking at her strangely; and he said slowly:

"Yes, one's mind loves to dwell upon that life of the cloister, as it was meant to be. Yet there is no blinding the eyes to its perils. You look surprised, my child; but I think that you will understand a little when I point out to you that there is peril in too much indulgence of the mystical side of the human mind, in the longing after visions, the long fastings which encourage them, the growing lack of balance which may gradually follow, till the most devout and earnest of these visionaries may become the very ripest instrument in the hand of the deceiver."

"What do you mean?" asked Lenore in an awe-struck tone, for the gravity of her companion struck a note almost like that of warning.

"I mean that history has shown us again and again

that some enemy of mankind—call it a personal devil if you will—or some malign power hovering in those realms about us of which at the present stage of our existence we have so little understanding or cognisance—is ever ready to seek an entrance into the human creature, if entrance can be found. Modern speculation and research gives names and explanations without end to this strange truth of our subconscious being. But it all comes to this. If man even in hopes of attaining to the Beatific Vision—the very gates of Heaven—loses too much his hold upon the flesh—that body given him for covering and protection—he is greatly in danger of opening gates to that which he knows not, desires not, would, if not uncovered, shrink from in terror. To my belief that was what happened yonder centuries ago. The enemy found entrance into the citadel. I know not how better to express it, and little by little terrible travesties of holy things were set on foot, till the neighbourhood was filled with fear and doubt and loathing! Then came the men of greed, who might not have dared to attack or rob a holy confraternity, whose good deeds were the joy and admiration of all. But who made these later legends the excuse for their violence and rapacity. And thus was brought about the destruction of the Monastery, which has never existed since.”

Lenore listened with wide, fascinated eyes and bated breath.

“And you think—that still. Ah! tell me what you think!”

“That is extremely difficult to put into words; for we are trenching on ground that can scarcely be discussed in terms of mortality. But the conclusion I have reached is that yonder, upon that hill, there may still be some kind of struggle going on which might occasionally result in psychic manifestations that would be, if not visible, yet mysteriously felt by persons dwelling there. More than that I cannot say. Perhaps already I have said too much . . .”

"No, indeed. I wanted to hear it all. And I thank you for speaking to me as one who does not mock at the unseen; for I am greatly wondering about this place. My husband has given it to me. But is it possible, perhaps, that it is for me, one day, and if he should be willing, to give it back into the hands of the Church from which it was wrested by cruelty and force?"

"Ah, there you go beyond me. I am not a man to whom the teachings of the Church make appeal. Yet I believe ardently in the existence of powers of good and evil, and in the ultimate triumph of the good. You will be helping in that struggle. Perhaps the struggle is being waged here before your very eyes—and you do not see it. Yet believe me, you may help in the righteous cause. . . .

"There, I will say no more. You have listened very patiently to the maunderings of a prosy old man. I could not have spoken like this to many persons on a first acquaintance. And now, here we are at your house. One day I will, with your permission, visit you there. But for the moment I say to you—Adieu—God be with you. For me, I go to seek good Sister Eulalie and her herbs!"

CHAPTER VIII

DIANA

SHE walked like a young goddess, as Leon had often thought and occasionally told her. He was behind her on the narrow track, for in many places there was only room for one person to walk.

The tinkle of falling water was in the air, and the shimmer of sunset's approach in the sky. As they reached a small plateau, where a seat had been set commanding through the fall of the ground a marvellous view over misty thickets, broken slopes and dells towards

a sea glimmering away to the south-west, Diana paused, took off her hat, shook back her clustering curls, and sank in a graceful attitude upon the seat.

"Oh, Leon, it is charming to be at home again!—and to feel that this time it is for good! I shall not be sent away, Daddy tells me. Only I may go if the spirit drives me elsewhere. I wonder if it ever will!"

"I wonder, too."

Leon spoke with an inflection in his voice which was not quite familiar to the girl, and caused her to turn her head quickly to look at him. He was standing with his shoulder braced against a tall poplar stem, the golden light laced by flickering shadows fell upon his young face, which was set in rather grave lines.

Her heart gave a queer little throb. From childhood Leon had stood for much in her life. She was an only child, and though he had a brother whom he adored, yet for many years that brother's physical infirmity had made a certain barrier between them when the activities of life were in question. Diana had been a tall, slim little girl when the accident happened which threw a cloud over Leon's life, and bit deep into his sensitive boy's soul, leaving him with a lasting sense of remorse. Dr. Rodin had attended Lucien, and by his skill had brought him back to life, and restored to him powers which once he was said to have lost for ever. And in those days, whilst the father ministered to the needs of one brother's shattered body, the daughter flung herself, with the ardour of a generous nature drowned in compassion, to the task of ministering to the needs—quite as acute—of the other's stricken soul.

And so a strong tie had been formed. Later years had brought long severances between the companions. But always they picked up the threads of their friendship with eagerness and zest. Sunshine seemed always to compass their path when together, and Diana could not ever seriously contemplate a future for herself in which Leon would not bear a part.

She had never cared to ask herself whither this all tended. There was something virginal and pure and wholesome in her outlook that hindered introspection. She knew at this moment that it was very good to be with Leon in this scented wood ; but she did not torment herself with questions as to the why or the wherefore.

"Leon," she said softly, "you too feel it good to be here, at home, do you not?"

"I do, very good," he answered, still with his eyes on the far horizon with its high glittering circle where sea and sky met in wondrous wedlock.

"Yet you are grave, Leon. I see that in glimpses through your gaiety. Is the old shadow lying still across your path? Indeed, I think it need not do so. For Lucien is one of the happiest persons I know. His life is full of compensations."

Leon slowly turned, so that, with his back against the tree, he stood and faced her squarely.

"I know it is. He is one of the happiest persons I know. He lives in a land of music and of dreams. And to-day, for the first time in all these years, I do not even regret that tragic happening of our boyhood. Indeed I can almost rejoice in it."

"Leon, what do you mean?"

"Can you not guess a little, Diana? You have been about the world of late. Have you heard nothing as to what is about to come?"

Her eyes widened slowly. She fixed them on his face. Very gradually her face grew pale.

"I believe I guess what you are thinking of, Leon. Yes, I have heard of it too. You mean—the European war, which Germany will one day provoke—at least some say so."

"I mean just that. For myself I believe that it is near. And for that reason I can rejoice that Lucien is out of it. He will remain here with his dreams and his music. He will not need to face the horrors that are coming."

"Leon, would you remain also—if you could?"

"Not for an hour! Not for a day! Diana, I am a Frenchman—a soldier! And we know what the Prussians were forty years ago. They will be worse now, after nearly thirty years of the rule of a megalomaniac obsessed by the dream of world domination. You know their creed. Make war so unspeakably horrible that every invaded nation will sue for peace at all price . . ."

"But Leon, Leon. The Hague Conventions!"

Leon lifted his fingers and lightly snapped them.

"That is what the German Emperor will do in face of conventions and the laws of war. England may retain her illusions yet. We in France know better. And so I am glad that Lucien will be far away from the storm centre. Though unless England joins with us, even this island may not be safe—or any spot in the wide world. Diana, tell me, will England stand in with us if . . ."

"Oh, Leon, I trust so! I think so. The nation would, I know. It is the politicians who are the danger."

"I know, I know. Hoodwinked by Germany. Hampered by their Labour Party and its chimerical outlook. But let England understand this very well. If we go down first, she will follow. And the Prussian jackboot will rule the world."

The sunshine over the sea was fading. Some birds flew by with quick little calls that for the moment sounded in Diana's ears like notes of distress. She looked up at Leon, and a great wistfulness crept into her eyes. He stood there so tall and straight, with that noble look upon his face which comes to those who are facing that supreme sacrifice which from time to time nations and individuals are called upon to make.

Their eyes met. He smiled. In that smile was a great worship. But the man was holding himself in hand. Diana sprang up, and they pursued their way together. Yet by common consent they spoke no more of war or its shadow. The girl's high hopes asserted themselves.

Surely in these enlightened days some way of escape would be found from primitive, barbaric horrors. The man, whose whole life had been in some sort a preparation for that Titanic struggle which France had known for a generation she would have to face, and who had seen warfare of a different kind already in Algeria, had no illusions as to ultimate developments.

But they talked gaily together of St. Cecilia and its inhabitants, and in particular of the coming of Lady Heristal to the Maison Monastère. Diana was keenly interested in that event, and filled with girlish curiosity about the lovely girl-wife she had seen, and her life in that house of strange traditions and legends.

"I shall go and see her soon. She said I might. Oh, Leon, is she not lovely?"

"A very exquisite creature; and with a voice as wonderful as her face. You came too late to hear her sing Lucien's Gloria in Excelsis! It lifted you up to Heaven's gates!"

"I will make her sing to me," spoke Diana. "I like to think of there being an English mistress in that big house. I will go soon, very soon now."

Diana did so. She was a splendid walker, and though there was horse or mule for her use whenever she required such help, it was generally her own feet that carried her. Odin, her great attendant hound, accompanied her on her more distant rambles, and it was with this faithful guard at her heels that she soon after ascended the monastery hill, and was met by Lenore before she reached the entrance gate.

Lenore had thought several times of the tall, graceful girl, so English of aspect, whose smile was like sunshine, and whose voice held a glad, boyish ring that was very attractive.

"Indeed, I should love to show you my home," Lenore told her. "I am loving it better every day. But often even now I get a little puzzled and confused! I have to think where I am, and look out of the windows. Do

come, and we will ramble over it together. I am glad you have come . . . Diana ! ”

She spoke the name with just a touch of pretty hesitancy ; and Diana answered her with a quick smile, and with a sudden kiss.

“ Of course, I am just Diana—to you and most people here, where I grew up. And although you are Lady Heristal and a stranger to us just now . . . ”

“ Yet I am going to be Lenore to you, and I hope a friend. I am very glad that you have come so soon. Your father was very kind to me the other day.”

“ Lenore—that is a pretty name. I don’t think I have ever met a Lenore—only in the poem, ‘ Quoth the Raven, never more ! ’ I said that once at a breaking-up function. And now I have a real Lenore for a friend ; and we won’t say ‘ never more ’ any more ! ”

They laughed together as young things do. Lenore’s soft colour was beginning to return. Her feet carried her with more lightness and less languor. In one of the big beautiful rooms they found Nurse Frome, mending the old tapestries with a skill that delighted Diana, who was herself an accomplished needle-woman. The talk between the pair was racy and enlivening ; and then Lenore and Diana pursued their way, followed by injunctions to be good girls, and not get into mischief, to which Diana gave laughing and saucy rejoinder.

“ She is such an old dear,” Lenore told her companion, “ not old really exactly, but such a comfort to me in a strange place. And they all like her, foreign servants and all. I do not know what I should have done without her, till my husband can come.”

“ And when will Lord Heristal come ? Daddy once saw him and liked him. But he has not been here much.”

“ No. He came to buy this place he had heard of, and then again to settle things when he wanted to give it to me ! I have known him a long time, though we have only been married a little while. He was very good to my father. And when I came to be with him—

with father, after I left the Sisters who had taken care of me for years—he came often to see us. He was always so kind to me . . .”

“I suppose he fell in love with you! So should I have done in his place.”

Lenore's soft colour mounted, her eyes took a happy shining.

“You see, he had cared for me ever since we knew one another; and I had come to care for him very, very much. Life would not be possible without Marcus, I think. And so we were married, before he had to take his long journey almost round the world to wind up all his affairs in the different countries. He is only going to keep this place, where we can have a villeggiatura sometimes. And in England there is Heristal Castle. But he is to come to me here when he has settled his affairs; and we are to have our honeymoon then, as he says. We could not do that before.”

“How glad you will be when he can join you. And meantime we must try and help you from being too lonely. Daddy said you were not a bit afraid about the house. Some people would be. But you have not seen or felt anything—queer?”

“I think that I feel only rather beautiful things,” said Lenore. “Come and see the little chapel, and you will better understand. I feel so guarded and protected.”

Diana went eagerly, and the peace and stillness of the cloister made its impression. The Sisters and the Reverend Mother greeted her very kindly. Dr. Rodin was their friend, and his daughter won their hearts by her bright liveliness and gay charm. Tea was brought to them in a shady corner of the garden, and Diana found it hard to tear herself away even when the shadows began to fall.

Lenore seemed loth to part with her, and Nurse Frome had an inspiration.

“Let us send word to the doctor that you will stop the night with my lady. It is clouding up a little—

look ! And you might chance to get a wetting. We will take care of you, and send you back safe and sound in the morning. I will settle it for you—don't you be afraid ! ”

They gladly gave her her way. It was a delight to Lenore to select a bedroom close to her own for her first guest, and Diana's happy laugh rang out again and again, as they heard a dash of rain against the windows, and realized the wisdom of Nurse Frome's advice. What a happy evening they would have together !

They did. The moonlight shone out later after the rainstorm had fled to the hills. They had a pine-cone fire lighted, yet sat with windows wide to the soft night air and the moonshine. They grew in intimacy as they talked, and the happy hours fled.

It was Nurse Frome who came in upon them at the last, looking a little puzzled.

“ There's a queer cowed monk or some such creature walking up and down the cloister,” she told them. “ I called out of a window to ask what he did there ; but he gave me no answer—just went on walking up and down, as though it was all right. So knowing that you and your priest of the chapel and the good sisters are all friends together, I thought I would come and ask you if he has any business to be there.”

Diana sprang up, excitement in her eyes. Lenore also rose.

“ I will come and see,” she answered quietly. “ Take me to the place you saw him from.”

CHAPTER IX

PHANTOM AND PRIEST

BREATHLESSLY the two girls followed the footsteps of Nurse Frome as she led the way. There was only one window in all the house which overlooked the

cloister, and that was an oriel in the corridor of the south wing on the upper floor.

The great central block of building from which the two wings jutted had a westerly aspect. Its great windows looked across the paved courtyard, and away over the falling landscape towards the sea with the hills rising from it. And the ground floor of the great block consisted of one huge hall, where statuary and pictures and strange or beautiful curios from far lands had been collected. Its windows were all to the west, and the wall opposite, behind which the cloister lay, was blank, pictures, tapestries and strange trophies adorning its long perspective, the marble statues making points of high light against a sombre background.

Above this great hall were spacious living-rooms looking west, and behind these a long corridor with windows to the east, which looked over the roof of the cloister and towards the chapel that lay beyond the green square of the burying ground. Yet none of these windows could command a view of the cloister beneath.

But the house was so constructed that the south wing ran a little way back in the direction of the chapel, and the corridor turned at a right angle leading direct into a deep oriel, and from this window a glimpse into the cloistered court could be obtained.

The nurse, with a finger at her lips, put her head out of this window, gazing out into the dusk. Her two companions crowded up to her and gazed also. Behind them the great hound placed huge paws upon the window seat, and sought to thrust his head through the narrow aperture.

For a few moments nothing was visible. The light, though fairly bright in the sky overhead, from the after-glow of sunset and the brilliance of the moon, was very dim in this shadowy square below. Suddenly Diana, who had hold of Lenore's hand, gave it a squeeze, and Nurse Frome simultaneously drew in her head, over

which the tall Diana had been looking. She pushed Lenore forward in her place.

"There he is," she whispered, "look at him! Up and down, as though it all belonged to him! Look at the creature!"

They were looking intently. Diana with the keenest curiosity and a most vivid expression on her face, Lenore with something of breathless wonder and expectancy.

For a few moments they stood spell-bound, watching the phantom-like figure. Then a little sound smote upon their ears. It sounded like a key turning in a lock. And as soon as this sound became audible, the cowed monkish figure came to a halt. It was as though it stood and listened.

The construction of the Court enclosed between cloister, house walls and chapel was on this wise. The long cloister wall faced east, looking upon the west front of the chapel, with the door through which the sisters entered it when they kept their hours there. To the north the cloister-court was closed by the great bulk of buildings projecting from and belonging to the north wing—servants' offices, stables, a great granary, and other adjuncts, which in olden times always formed part of such a dwelling-house. No windows looked out this way, but a much narrower and more modern cloistered or arcaded walk stood out from the blank wall leading towards the chapel, and beneath its shelter was another smaller door, which at this moment grated softly on its hinges, and a dusky, black figure emerged, just visible in the shadows beneath the overhead vaulting.

"It is Father Augustin," said Lenore softly. "He comes sometimes to see me, after his prayers in the chapel. But—who is—that other?"

That other, the cowed figure had come to a stand. He stood about half-way down the east cloister. Then suddenly, with a strange stealthy swiftness he seemed to glide towards its farther end. The shadows swallowed him. He disappeared. But at that spot there was no

possible exit for a flesh-and-blood being. The walls were solid, with the grim solidity of the century in which men built their houses for all time.

The priest walked slowly forward. As he reached the shadowy angle where the cowed figure had disappeared, he seemed to lift his hand and make the holy sign. Then he moved quietly on his way, and Lenore, running lightly along the corridor and down the great staircase, met him as he passed out of the cloister, and took both his hands in an eager welcome.

"Dear Padre, but it is good of you to come and see me. Without doubt you come in a good moment. We were watching from the oriel window—looking down into the cloister. *Mon père*, did you see that strange being which we saw? Diana Rodin is here. She has taken her big dog down to see if he can tell us anything! Did you see it?"

"My child, I have often seen it. This is not the first time."

"My father—but what is it? Why comes it here? Is it of good or of evil? Is it something which we should fear . . . ?"

"My child, why need any fear whose trust is sure? The holy angels, our Lady, our Blessed Lord Himself are ever near to guide and protect us. Why need those who have faith to hold fast this confidence fear the assaults of evil?"

"That is what I feel. My father, I am happy you should so speak. I think the blessed ones are very near us—far nearer and far stronger than the powers of darkness." She paused, because Diana and her great dog were approaching swiftly. They all went up the great staircase together. Servants were drawing heavy curtains and lighting candles before silver sconces set against the wall. Softly-shaded lamps burned in the rooms.

"No, he was not afraid. And yet he smelt something, he went up and down, up and down, as the shadowy monk went. And he glued his nose for long against

that dark angle of the wall where he seemed to disappear. Father Augustin, how do you do? Yes, I shall talk English, for you can understand it quite well when you try! And we have been watching a ghost—whom you seemed to scare away! Does that mean that it was a bad spirit!”

“I would that I knew the answer to that question,” spoke the priest with a gravity so deep that Diana put aside her jesting manner, and took her seat almost at his feet, looking up at him with a pretty kind of appeal. She had known him from childhood, and Dr. Rodin had for him a respect he by no means always showed towards ecclesiastics.

“Do you mean,” she asked very seriously, yet with extreme eagerness of manner, “that there is really something supernatural in what we have seen to-night? I was not a bit skeery myself, nor Odin. And I thought dogs generally knew—and feared—if they were near to something uncanny.”

The priest’s ascetic and spiritual face, which Lenore had come to love and trust, lighted up with an expression of aroused interest.

“I have heard that myself—how dogs will shrink and howl at some unseen presence. And that is interesting, what you say of Odin. He saw—and did not fear?”

“Yes, he saw, and he grumbled a protest till I stopped him. For we wanted to watch, and did not wish to scare the ghost away. Padre, tell us what you think! Is it a phantom monk, come to re-visit the scenes of his past life? Do they?—can they! And is it the wicked ones or the good ones who try to return? Can you tell us?”

“No, my children,” he answered, for Lenore’s eyes were watching him intently also. “We tread the threshold of deep mysteries when we look into these things. And yet there is a world around and about us which is invisible to our eyes. And we may not say that this or

that is impossible ; for the weight of evidence is too great to be thus lightly dismissed because it touches upon the borders of a land as yet unexplored."

"That is what Daddy says! You know he is not religious like you, Padre! And yet he knows that there are things going on about us—things we cannot see or understand. And he believes that this place is not quite like others—that what happened in the past draws spiritual emanations towards it. Oh, I can't say it right! But you understand, do you not?"

"My child, I do, and have spoken often with your father upon the matter—over which he and I are in agreement, albeit on different spiritual planes. Both of us recognize the struggle between good and evil, of which this hill has been the earthly site. And both of us feel that that struggle is not yet ended. But it is not of this that I would speak to you to-night. It is of some other more mundane and material peril—or possibility of peril—that I would warn you."

"Oh, Padre!" cried Diana with eyes glowing with wonder and excitement, "tell us what you mean! Material peril! But from what enemy?"

The old priest's face was very grave; there was a troubled expression in the deep-set eyes he turned towards Lenore. But she smiled at him with tranquillity.

"I am not afraid. My husband sent me here. But I want to hear what you would say."

"I have been troubled for above two weeks now, my child—ever since I saw the cowed monk pacing the cloister. It is a sign I do not like—I almost fear."

"Tell us why, *mon père*. What is the story of the prowling monk, then?"

"There are many stories as to that. Too many for me to tell. Yet from all I have gleaned concerning that appearance, it seems to forebode misfortune to any persons who are seeking to dwell in the Maison Monastère. Let me explain. When I arrived here some years before the last century closed, all the place remembered the

French family of Perigorde, who fled from Alsace and the German occupation, and found an asylum here in this very house. But they could not remain. The cowed monk began to walk. He was seen of many. Strange tales began to be whispered. Then a fearful thing happened. Madame Perigorde was found lying dead upon the cloister graves, and upon her face a look of unspeakable fear. Other strange things happened. Two fine young lads sickened suddenly and died with symptoms of poisoning. Dr. Rodin was called in. He made investigations. Poison there certainly had been ; but how administered there was nothing to show. And the monk was seen by many persons, sometimes seeming to hold up a threatening hand. Servants fled. And before long M. Perigorde was gone, with what remained to him of his family."

"Ah," exclaimed Diana, "I remember some story of Daddy's about those poisoned boys. And after the Perigordes had gone—what then?"

"Why, then the place stood empty for years. But about seven years ago a young Italian couple with one little child, a lovely boy four years old, came with the intention of settling. Again it was whispered that the monk was seen in the cloister . . ."

"I suppose when the place was empty no one would see him even if he came. Or does he only come when the house is lived in?"

"I cannot tell you anything for certain as to that ; for my connection with the chapel here is only recent, since Lord Heristal permitted the Sisters to make a home here and restored the chapel for worship. But the story goes that he only comes when the house owns inmates. And now for what happened to those gentle persons, whom I knew and loved ; for they asked me to visit and minister to them, which was a great joy to me. They lived here in peace for some little while, smiling at the whispers they had heard. Then one day I found them a little troubled and perplexed. The cowed monk

had been seen in the cloister. After that—another terrible tragedy—and deep mystery.”

“Oh, Padre—what?”

“A night came when the lovely child was put to sleep as ever in a tiny room off that of his parents. No way into it was known, save by passing through the larger apartment. The door of this apartment was locked, and when they arose in the morning the parents found it locked as always; but the mother, stealing in to look at the child, who generally awakened first, gave a cry of amazement; for the little bed was empty. The boy was gone!”

“Gone!” spoke Lenore with breathless wonder, “but when?—how?”

“And after long and frantic search the little body was found in the fountain of the courtyard, lying face downwards amongst some water-lilies which used then to grow here, but which were rooted out in the wild search after some clue to the mystery. The child loved the fountain, and would often stretch to try and grasp the lilies. But how he was spirited away in the dead of night from his parents’ very presence was never known—no trace of entrance into the locked house was ever discovered. The tragedy remained shrouded in mystery.”

“Oh!” whispered Diana beneath her breath, “I never heard that tale before!”

“No. It happened when your father was absent. And those who owned the property then did all they could to hush up the matter. For already the house had a bad name. They were seeking to find a purchaser. It seemed to be under a curse. But Mr. Heristal came a few years later, and he has bought it. What he may have heard I know not. And now the cowed monk has been seen perambulating the cloister. I have made many prayers for the peace of this place. The Sisters keep their hours in the chapel. I had cherished great hopes that these visitations would cease. My daughter, I tell you these things not to affright you . . .”

"Father, I am not afraid. I had some knowledge before I came that the Maison Monastère was not altogether as are other places. I think that I was not sorry for this. My husband sent me. He will come to me here soon. I can await his coming with great tranquillity. I am not afraid."

The priest raised one white hand and made the holy sign, as the girl bent her head.

"May our Lord and the Holy Mother reward that faith of thine, my child. It is the pure in heart who see Him. And those who behold His unveiled face in beatific vision cannot be hurt or made afraid."

Diana sprang up with a very vivid purpose in her eyes.

"Oh, you mystics, you mystics! I love you for it; but I must think on material lines against material foes. Lenore, I shall leave Odin with you. I have a brother of his at home, growing from puppyhood. Soon there will be jealousies between them. You shall keep Odin for me. He will shadow you night and day. He is fidelity incarnate. Odin shall prove himself a match for that prowling monk!"

Father Augustin looked distinctly relieved.

"A good thought, my child," he said to Diana, "for ever since I saw again that cowed prowling figure, my heart has been heavy within me. Lady Heristal, take that gift, and let that faithful dog be with you by night and day here in this house. For truly when that cowed figure begins to pace the cloister walk—I fear that there is danger abroad."

CHAPTER X

CLOUD BURST

SPRING merged itself in summer—a radiant summer of beauty and wonder for Lenore. Every week found her with a richer endowment of silent contentment

in her lot. Her gardens flamed and glowed with successive forms of loveliness. Her deep shady walks were haunts of peace in a life which seemed full of immutable serenity. From time to time a letter from Marcus would reach her, and then her cup of happiness was full to the brim.

She loved those letters! They were never long. They were scarcely love-letters in the ordinary acceptance of the term. And yet she felt at once the protective power of his virile strength, and the deep intensity of his love, which reached across to her over thousands of leagues, and drew her to him with the world between them.

She sought to picture him in his roving life. He told her his plans, and her letters were filled with an ardent sympathy and desire to comprehend all that engrossed him. "I am so happy here," she told him every time; "it only needs your coming to make it quite perfect. Yet you must not hasten too much on that account. You must not let our marriage be a stumbling-block in your path. One day we shall be together again. That will be very beautiful. I think of it every day, and often I dream of it at night. But I am very, very happy. I can wait."

Never a word to him of those whispers and stories which indeed touched her singularly little. She had the great dog now always with her at her side by day, and sleeping at night on the rug which lay in the open doorway between her room and Nurse Frome's. But she had not seen the cowed figure again in the cloister, though often she had watched for it. There were times when Odin had shown some slight displeasure when she had taken her way to the chapel, lifting his head, sniffing the air, and then leaping into the cloistered walk, and pacing to and fro with his nose to the ground, his tail lashing slightly from side to side. He always made a long pause at that corner where the wall turned at a right angle, and his sniffings became more audible. But

though Lenore and her nurse made many examinations, the walls seemed as solid and impenetrable as though built for all time. Not a crack or crevice could they find, and there was no chink large enough for a beetle to find his way through.

Lenore would have been absolutely happy in her home, even had she lived there in undisturbed tranquillity. But her friends would not suffer that. The Marquise would often drive up the hill, to sit awhile with Lenore in one of her stately rooms.

Frequently Lenore would accompany her guest home, to listen to Lucien's music, to pace the garden paths with eager, dashing Leon, and before she left to delight them all with the loveliness of her beautiful voice.

The cultivation of that voice was one of Lenore's happiest pastimes now. She knew that Marcus loved music; but she did not think he had ever heard her sing, or had known she possessed the dower of a very glorious gift. So for him she cherished that gift, and eagerly absorbed from Lucien all that he could teach her, which was not a little. Some of her happiest hours were spent with him in that cedar-lined music room.

Once, after she had been singing a "Salve Regina" with an intensity of passionate supplicative energy which was something new in her method, he let his hands drop at the end, and turned to look at her face, which still wore an expression of mystical devotion that fired his spirit with some strange quality of wonder and awe.

"Lady," he said gently, "may I put the question?—of what—of whom—were you thinking as you poured out your soul just now? For you have never sung quite like that before. Did you know it?"

Lenore looked at him with dreamy intensity of gaze.

"I believe that I was thinking of—my husband. I heard from him yesterday. And his letter has given me much cause for thought."

"We all have much to think of in these days. Since that tragedy in Sarajevo."

"Yes. I did not understand at the first why all were so serious. Why Leon was summoned back. Why your mother's face takes a new gravity, why Dr. Rodin looks grim and speaks strangely of the things which may come. And now my husband's letter seems to explain it better to me. Lucien, I am not clear about his full meaning; but it may be that there will come something upon the world which will sever us longer than we thought."

"Ah!—then Lord Heristal thinks it will mean—war!"

"He has not said it in words. But I read between the lines. He says he is making his way homewards with all speed. He must wind up his business hastily and be gone. And he asks me if I can be ready to answer the call of duty, and let him do the same. Lucien, my husband is not a soldier. Tell me, what does he mean? What would be the call of duty for him?"

Lucien rose and came forward towards her. He took her hands in his very gently, and looked her full in the eyes.

"Lenore," he said softly, for by that time he and his brother had begun so to call her; "Lenore, do you not understand what it means for a nation like yours, which has never before needed an army of great magnitude, to be plunged into the vortex of a world-wide struggle, such as this may well be, if the spark kindled last month break into conflagration? Tens of thousands of men who never thought to wield arms will fly to join the colours. Men like your husband, who are fine riders, fine shots—as doubtless he is—who have youth and strength and that great gift of command that seems inherently the endowment of the Englishman of a certain class—will they be spared? Will they spare themselves? If you were indeed thinking of him as you sang that great prayer, you did well to put all that power into your glorious voice! And may it ascend to the very gates of Heaven, on behalf of him and of countless other brave men who will be called upon to face horrors and death at the call of duty!"

Lenore's face grew gradually very pale.

"Lucien, do you think all that?—think that there will be war?—and that Marcus must be there in the heart of it? Oh, Lucien, Lucien, when I have heard you all talking, I have never thought of that!"

Very tenderly, with eyes deep with meaning he could never utter, he gazed into her quivering face. A thrill sounded in his next words.

"Lenore, Lenore!—do you love him—so much?"

"But of course I love him, Lucien. He is my husband."

"I know—I know," he answered, "God and our Lady forbid that I should ever forget! But yet, may I say it?—for thought will not be bound. I have sometimes asked myself whether you have yet learned the mystery, the glory, the splendour, the terror (if I may so express what never can find adequate equivalent in words) of that love which transcends all others upon earth, and keeps it for ever vital, pure, endowed with powers of life and being, of glory and of grace, such as none can know save those before whom the golden gates are widely flung. Have your eyes looked into that radiant land, Lenore?"

Whilst he was speaking something of faint perplexity and trouble had crept into the girl-wife's eyes. Had she not been asking of herself some such question, only in a far less coherent or articulate form? Were not perceptions stealing upon her in the sweet solitude of her great house and her silent life, perceptions of ultimate goals of glory as yet hidden from her view? What were those words which her husband had spoken almost in the moment of their parting?

"Wait for me, Lenore! I have so much to teach you yet, my darling, my own, my wife! Let me be your teacher; for in truth I think that you will be apt to learn! We have such a glorious road to tread together yet."

How often had she pondered those words, as in her shadowy garden she had sat musing with a book upon her knee, in which some poet had thrilled her heart by

his passionate music of the love which rises to infinite heights of wonder and majesty.

Now, looking into Lucien's impassioned eyes, brimming with some quality of mystical worship which he would never seek to put into words, she was acutely aware that he could have taught her much—so much. And yet it was not from him that she must learn. Some deep-seated virginal instinct implanted in her innermost being told her that. Yet their eyes met in a gaze of mutual understanding, and her smile was tremulous and quivering.

"I do not know, Lucien," she answered very softly, "you speak as Marcus did to me: of a land yet very far off, which nevertheless lies all around us. Together we shall one day seek it. Then I shall know all."

Gently he dropped the hands which he was holding. His eyes burned upon her, and yet she could fearlessly meet their light. She trusted him instinctively and utterly.

"Yes," he told her very gently, "then you will know all. I pray Heaven you may find it, and that it may be all to you—and him—which it can be. I, too, have glimpses of that promised land—promised to some and found of them—which all of us envisage and press forward towards at the outset of life; though not all attain its golden portals. But at least we others can watch the passing of the favoured ones, and rejoice with them in their entrance into realms infinitely remote from the devastating turmoil of human life. That may be my portion in the future perhaps. Yet if I watch your happiness only from afar I shall be content."

She looked at him with a wistful sweetness and wonder in her eyes; but she dared not ask his meaning. She felt that they were treading the verge of some perilous chasm. Its depths were hidden from her sight, yet she was pulsatingly aware of them.

"You are good, Lucien," she told him, "and you are strong. And you are my friend, is it not so?"

Again he took her hands and held them firmly and very steadily.

"Always your friend, dear lady, so long as you will suffer it. And may God preserve me from any act or word—nay even from any thought—which might render me in any wise unfit to stand beside you, as at this moment, holding your hands, and asking only the privilege to serve you—to worship as at a shrine."

The last words were spoken rather in his heart than by his lips. Lenore did not catch them; yet she in measure guessed their import. Her eyes were very soft.

"You are good, Lucien," she repeated; "I love to think that I may retain your friendship and be worthy of it. For if terrible things are coming on the world, I shall need my friends. I must not hold my husband back from his duty—I must not even try. If I could help him by joining him I would gladly and willingly fly to his side. But I know a little what war must be like. The separation of husband and wife is one of its most cruel tragedies."

Lucien made a sign of assent. He strove to retain within bounds the lightning thoughts and visions which flooded his mind of ultimate possibilities, brought about by the threatened cataclysm, which every turn in the rushing happenings of that fateful July seemed to bring nearer, to make more inevitable.

Leon had gone back absolutely convinced that Germany meant war, and would have nothing else. Hide it as she might, France knew that she longed to place the strangle-grip of her immense armies upon that nation which, when once laid low, would give her just what she needed for her larger enterprises towards world-domination.

Fearlessly he had gone back; but he knew to what he was returning. His letters since breathed the same spirit of conviction, and were read with deepest interest in the Dream House of the Marquis of Québriac, and by the Rodins, who came regularly to hear the news, when any vessel from France entered the harbour. The papers

were also eagerly scanned. Diana's face grew tense with the stress of her feelings.

Often she would rise early and find herself by breakfast-time at the Maison Monastère, for was not Lenore in like case with herself? If war came, what would be the decision of Marcus, Lord Heristal. He had started to come to his wife, but his route lay of necessity through England. July was running its course. Every day seemed tense with the thrill of coming tragedy. Wires flashed from all the ends of the earth. The stir and the sense of stress permeated all lands and all classes.

Lenore and Diana would watch the flaming sunsets of those days, asking if some strange portent might not be written athwart the sky by the finger of God Himself. Then at last there came an evening, flooded with golden light and the scarlet stain as of blood across the heavens from horizon line to zenith, when as the two girls stood at gaze, hand clasped in hand (for the prescience of trouble was drawing very near), a strange sound smote upon their ears, rising from the streets of the town far below through the thin purity of the hot, breathless air.

Lenore had no idea what that strange sound meant; but Diana threw up her head, like a war-horse that scents the battle from afar—

“The tocsin—the tocsin!” she cried. “Lenore, that can only mean one thing! It is war! The war has begun!”

CHAPTER XI

THE STATE OF WAR

IT seemed unbelievable, yet it was true. La Patrie had suffered the insult. The foot of the foeman was on her soil. And even in the far-off, dreamy little isle of St. Cecilia her sons were springing forward to answer to the call.

Busy days full of intimate, pathetic moments. The vessel lying in port, the drums calling their message, the sergeants hurrying the recruits on board. Mothers and wives, who would not weep until their men were gone, accompanying them laughing to the quay. Children clinging to the hands of the fathers they might never see again, clamouring to be taken also that they, too, might fight the pigs of Prussians! Girls holding their heads high, as they clasped the arm of the *fiancé*, proud of his uniform, proud of his mission, cheering him by brave words, laughing gaily in the thought that very soon he would be back. Wives with smiling lips and haggard eyes, intent upon making sure that the dear departing one had with him every one of those tiny comforts which the exigencies of the moment permitted him to carry away.

Diana watched it all, her heart far away in the unknown, where already, for all she knew, Leon might be fighting, might be in deadly peril—might be dead! She would never voice that thought—but it was always there.

The Marquise herself drove down to the quay-side to watch the going forth of her own servants and tenants. She held herself erect, her proud old face betrayed no fear, and her smile was treasured by all upon whom it fell.

“You do well, my children,” she would say; “you answer to the call of the mother whom we all love. Let not your hearts fail you. Great things will you see and do. To each a share in the glory which shall one day be ours. The great sacrifice will assuredly be demanded of some amongst you. But you will make it gladly—with a steadfast courage. I know it. And I rejoice. My heart will go with you in all the perils you will be called upon to meet. *Vive la France! Vive la Justice!* And again and yet again, *Vive la Patrie!*”

The vessel sailed at sun-down. Later on, perhaps, another would come to fetch away the younger conscripts. But for the moment St. Cecilia had furnished sufficient

contingent. Then, just before it sailed, a message was flashed across the sea, and when its meaning was made known in the town, waves of cheering rolled up and down the streets, and out upon the sea-front, and even to the vessel just slowly warping her way out of harbour.

"England has declared war upon Germany. England stands in with France! *Vive l'Angleterre!*"

A little later, and Lenore stood amid the shadows of her coolest room, for it was a blazing August day, holding in her hands a letter from her husband. And before she opened it she knew all.

Marcus had offered himself for any service his country might ask of him, and at this moment all the cry was for fighting men. He had known his drill from boyhood. He had handled arms and commanded men in many small uprisings in different quarters of the globe. He would not be long in getting a commission, he told her, and there was but one thing to do at such a time—to follow the call of duty, wherever it might lead.

"I wish I could come to you first, my dearest," he wrote, "but that cannot be. The need is too pressing, the peril too acute. I trust that danger will not menace you. But none can say as to that. German ships are on the sea and German submarines beneath it. To picture my wife in peril, whilst duty keeps me far away, would be a desolating horror, were it not that we both of us know how to answer duty's call. All over the world it is the same. Humanity is rising to meet a great demand. You will do your part, Lenore, as I trust I may be able to do mine. And I pray that in better days than these we may meet again in peace."

So Marcus was gone once more from her, before she had seen him again. Her face was very wistful as she lifted her eyes and looked round her.

"I will go to see the Marquise," said Lenore to Nurse Frome. "I will have my horse and ride there."

Of late she had begun to ride again, enjoying the companionship of Diana on her sure-footed mule or gay little

Arab. She had a bright chestnut mare herself, a beautiful creature of Lucien's selection ; so quickly she donned her cool white linen riding garb, and with Odin in close attendance, took the downward familiar road which led to the Maison Morisco—the House of Dreams.

"Thou art welcome, my child," spoke the Marquise, holding out her hands with a welcoming smile upon her face, which showed a few more lines than had been there a month ago ; albeit her calm quietude of manner had suffered no diminution. "I have been alone to-day. My Lucien has had to set aside his music, and waken from his dreams ! There is much to be thought of in these strange days. Hast thou come, then, with news thyself, little one ? "

Lenore loved to be so called by her old friend. She told of the letter she had received. Censorship was just being established, though this letter had come through without the censor's stamp.

"You see, he arrived just upon the declaration of war. And of course he saw his duty plain before him. I am proud to be a soldier's wife ! I would not have summoned him here had I had the power to do so. His duty comes first—to his country. Have I not seen those other wives—those mothers with smiling faces, who only wept when the men had gone ? I think that has taught me what true courage is. The men must not bear the double burden. We must hide it from them if our hearts are breaking. Have I not heard ? "

A little later, as they sat upon the terrace together, Lucien came upon them, pale, tired, yet with light on his face and in his eyes, a steadfast, half-brooding look that was something new.

"How goes it in the town, my son ? " the Marquise asked, and a servant hovering in the background received from her a signal which he plainly understood.

"Not altogether well," he answered, "for despite our watchfulness there have been disappearances for which it is difficult to account. Three Germans from the internment

camp have vanished, no one knows how. And a few of those naturalized Germans in the town, over whom a certain watch has been kept, are missing from their usual places of business. They cannot have left the island. The watch upon all vessels has been too close. But it does not look well that there should have been these sudden flights. Some outside aid the interned men must have had, or they could not have effected their escape. And we do not know who the traitors may be. We have changed the guard. But the harm is done. Some of our foes are at large upon the island. That is not well."

"Can they hurt us?" Lenore asked. "What could they do? We lie so far away from the scene of war. Surely it can never really touch us here!"

He looked at her gently, a half-smile playing over his fine features. And his glance shifted to his mother's face. His expression slowly changed to one of almost stern resolve.

"The horrors of war will, I trust, never seriously menace these shores," he said; "and should the foot of foeman defile this strand, I think that we of St. Cecilia's Isle could yet make shift to give good account of ourselves! But it were folly to think ourselves beyond the reach of danger. Germany is ever on the warpath after points of strategic value. An island-base in this Mediterranean Sea, with the coast of Algiers none so far away, might very well tempt her. True, for the moment her hands are full, and her ships penned up in the North Sea. God grant that England may hold them there! But there are some yet abroad—and there are those slinking silent submarines to reckon with! We must not be caught sleeping or supine. Our island has its forts, France knows how to protect her possessions. But there are other points which must be strengthened now. Lenore, we have been speaking in the town as to this. The Maison Monastère, set upon its hill, occupies a commanding position. We think of putting there an emplacement for guns. Would that meet your approval?"

We would so arrange matters that the soldiers in charge should be no source of discomfort to you."

Lenore looked at him with wondering eyes. Guns at her home—soldiers guarding her silent house! How strange!—how unthinkable!

"But of course you must do what is right for the island. For myself I am not afraid. You may smile, perhaps, and yet I feel it all through me—that my house will not be touched! I know that there are strange stories about it. I know that evil deeds have been wrought there. But yet I have more and more strongly a conviction that all will be well with it yet! Good and evil have struggled there for long; but the powers of good will prevail."

Mother and son looked at her, and both of them caught that light in her eyes which was kindled from some unseen source. The Marquise asked a quiet question.

"What gives you that confidence, my child? Out in the world we seem to see that in the dread struggle it is the power of evil which too often prevails."

Lenore clasped her hands together as they lay upon her lap. But the words were hard to find, and she was not sorry for the interruption of the servant bringing coffee for herself and Lucien, whilst a message at the same time took the Marquise back to the house. In those days many flocked to consult her ripe experience, and receive benefits from her generous, though wisely bestowed alms.

Lucien looked quietly at Lenore when they were alone and asked:

"What is it that you feel about your home up yonder? What is the confidence you have?—since for many others it has proved itself an unfriendly, a somewhat deadly, abode."

"I know," she answered—"I have heard the stories. I wonder if I could make you understand what is the confidence which upholds me."

"Try," he answered gently and earnestly; "I think I shall not misunderstand."

"What I feel," said Lenore, after a pause for thought,

"is just this. I believe that in the long-ago past, when the monastery stood, and monks lived there according to their rule, it was the home of holy influences, beautiful lives, and deeds of piety and charity, the memory of which never dies. And though it may be that later on corruption stole insidiously upon the successors of the first Brotherhood, surely the condemnation and retribution which fell upon them through the violent hands of men served its purpose of annihilation and chastisement! God overthrew the evil through the hands of men, and I think that He does not exact punishment twice here upon earth. Those men who had sinned yielded up their lives, it is said, in fire and smoke, and at the edge of the sword. I do not feel that they are doomed to haunt the place of their earthly sin and apostasy (if such it were) through all these ages. I think that . . ."

She paused, a strange illumination on her face, which wrought upon his spirit very poignantly. He held his breath as he put a question very low.

"What, then, do you think, Lenore?"

"I think that in places where intercession has gone up year after year to the throne of God, evil—spiritual evil—finds it very hard to find or keep a footing. God looks down and guards and saves it from the taint of uncleanness. He may use carnal weapons in the hands of men; but He works in His own ways which we may not fully understand. I do believe that the wickedness of men has worked around my home, and may work there still. More I cannot say, for I do not know. But I have no fear. For I feel the presence there of that which is holy and protective. And I feel that those who are with us are stronger than those who are against us. The Reverend Mother and the Sisters understand. And no fears trouble or molest them."

Lucien gazed at her earnestly. Anxiety was not absent from his look.

"You speak of the wickedness of man, Lenore. What is it you mean?"

“That I do not know,” she answered quietly. “And neither do I fear.”

CHAPTER XII

MEANS OF DEFENCE

BY little after daybreak Diana was across at the Maison Monastère.

“Lenore, Lenore—do you know? Have you heard? They are bringing up the gun to place it above your house, on that ridge where the pine-trees grow! We are to have one on our terrace! Daddy understands a lot about trajectories and guns and emplacements. They have been taking surveys and making observations all over the island. But I never knew they had guns here quietly hidden away, waiting for possibilities! But they have—modern guns, too; and trained gunners to serve them. The men are a bit wild at not going to France. But these are the older ones, who have served in Algeria. Fancy listening to the thunder of guns except in salute! Oh, Lenore, if only we knew more what is going on yonder—where Leon is!”

Lenore laid a tender hand upon Diana's shoulder. Odin had his great head thrust up in devoted homage. He had by this time given loyal love and allegiance to his new mistress; but that did not mean that he had in any wise forgotten her who had been his first.

“Dearest, I think that Leon means a great deal to you in your life!”

“He does. I am not ashamed to say it, although we are not betrothed, and perhaps never shall be. Of course in birth we are not the equals of the De Québriacs. I know that. They have the blood of the old *noblesse* in their veins. But those who are young, of the young generation, think little of that. And yet Leon has never told

me that he cares. Always we have been friends ; and more than ever since Lucien was set apart from active life. But for years, Lenore, I know he felt as though, like Cain, he had a mark upon his brow. It was foolish ; for he had never meant to hurt his brother. He was just rash and reckless. Always so full of courage and the spirit of adventure, he would not pause to heed consequences. Then that tragedy ! And I think he spoke more to me than to any other person. You see, if Lucien had been killed—and it was a miracle he was not—then Leon would have been the Marquis and owner of all the property and revenues. And even now he feels that if Lucien does not marry, he stands in a place which never should be his. You would not guess, seeing him so gay and seemingly careless, how these thoughts and memories eat into his soul. But so it is. He said to me once, long ago now, ‘ I can never ask a woman to be my wife. Always I should feel that some day in my reckless carelessness I might do her a hurt. And, besides, if I have not life-blood on my hands, I have the death of those joys which make the glory and crown of manhood. How can I snatch at that, which by my hateful recklessness I have rendered impossible for my brother ? I should feel like a supplanter and defrauder.’ That is what he said to me once. And now—O Lenore—I saw it in his eyes. He was glad to go ! And once almost at the last he said, ‘ I can face it better now. Lucien stays. I go. Perhaps I have saved his life, after all ’.”

“ Did he say that ? Does he feel all that ? How little one knows what lies beneath the surface. One would have called Leon so gay—so insouciant ! ”

“ Yes, I know. That is how he seeks to show himself, that Lucien may not understand. They love each other so much ! It is beautiful. That is why he has felt it all so terribly.”

“ One can understand that. And yet, surely, he has a little exaggerated. Lucien has always seemed to me a singularly happy man. His home, his mother, his music.”

"I know, I know. That is what I have said a thousand times to Leon; but the feeling he has will not leave him. It is a little morbid. You know the French temperament! So much of surface gaiety, and yet beneath such capacities for sorrow! I have watched it all; and I have so longed—for something—to happen!"

"What have you longed for, Di?"

The girl gave Lenore a quick searching glance, and turned her face a little away.

"I have felt that if Lucien were to fall in love with one who could give her heart into his keeping, that the cloud would pass right away from Leon's life. How the dear Marquise would welcome a daughter! And the house of dreams would become a house of awakening joy and gladness. Ah—how I have pictured what it might be! And Lucien—what a very perfect lover he would make! One feels it through and through!"

"I know what you mean," spoke Lenore with dreaming eyes. "A woman who had won the love of such a heart might well find great rapture and happiness. Perhaps, some day . . ."

Diana's gaze devoured her face. She looked more vividly alive than Lenore had ever seen her, as though thoughts were stirring and kindling within her which she might not try to voice in words.

"Perhaps, perhaps. That is what I say sometimes to myself; for who knows what the future may hold? And oh, Lenore, it comes over me again and yet again, that if Lucien were to know this happiness—if he were to marry—then the stone would roll from Leon's neck. And in his brother's happiness and content he would find his own!"

Lenore looked at the vital quivering young creature, and understood.

"And that would mean your happiness also, dearest Diana?"

For a moment the girl hid her flushed face in her hands; then, lifting it proudly and gladly, she said:

"I think it, I think it! I am not ashamed for you to know that I love him. And in truth I believe that if he suffered himself to dream of such a thing—he would find that he loves me."

But there was no time for further talk. Nurse Frome was approaching them with the news that the Marquis de Québriac was at the gates to speak with Lady Heristal; and upon the road a little below the mule team with the gun had halted, till it was settled with her as to the placing it in position.

Lucien looked well on horseback. He was captain to the body of volunteers who were appointed, together with the military officials, to take adequate measures for the defence of the island. He wore the uniform in which he sometimes appeared at public functions, and much of the dreaminess had left his eyes, though his face would always be of a thoughtful cast. He saluted the ladies without dismounting, asking permission to show Lady Heristal the spot where it was thought best to mount the gun.

It was not far away—it lay through a winding track trending upwards, and all a-twinkle this morning with the sunny brilliance overhead. The air was fresh and life-giving, and when they reached the little plateau which Lenore had only once visited before, she gazed about her with eyes full of wonder. The view was so glorious—upwards through a chasm clothed with laurel and young pine-trees, towards solemn heights cut sharp against a turquoise sky, downwards to the rocks guarding the coast, and the sparkle of the sea. How immensely peaceful it all looked in the glad shining of a late summer's day! How strange the intrusion of the great grey iron-throated monster, the clatter of the hoofs of the mule team, the shouts of the drivers, the cracking of whips!

It was extremely interesting to watch the men at their work. A hut was to be built to accommodate the patrol appointed to keep watch. Lenore volunteered

to feed the men, and resolved that their hut should be fitted up with every reasonable comfort. She gazed through the telescope Lucien had brought into the blue waters of the bay, and understood how easily in that deep, clear water a slinking submarine might act. It might indeed be needful that guns should be set where they could send such vessels to their doom ; for, although at the present moment these U-Boats were small and carried little armament, whispers were already afloat of vastly different craft under construction, and no one could clearly guess what strange and terrible things might be seen ashore and on sea, should the war be prolonged in the way some prophets feared.

Yet weeks came and weeks passed, the year closed and another one opened, and life on St. Cecilia's Isle was strangely little changed, though the shadow lay athwart its sunshine here as all over the world.

News was hard to come by. That was the chiefest trouble. A wireless installation caught messages which gave just the trend of the happenings in the various theatres of war ; but shipping seemed almost to have been swept from the face of the waters. A few grain boats from Africa reached the harbour ; but from Europe the boat service was almost suspended. Once in about six weeks a little steamer with mails would appear ; but even so, the paucity of letters was great. Lenore had only heard twice from Marcus all through the winter.

Then one smiling day in early March a cable message reached the Marquise. Leon had been wounded—seriously. That was all. No details—and none likely to follow. Far away her son lay suffering and perhaps imperfectly tended. It might be that hostile shells from enemy air-craft were dropping death-dealing bombs upon the building in which he lay ! She spoke calmly of these horrors, yet with despair in her eyes. And Lenore, suddenly moved by an immense compassion, knelt down beside her and took her hands very tenderly.

“Dearest Madame, do not look like that ! For indeed, though he lies far away from the tendance of our hands, yet we can help him. And there are others who can watch over him. Ah, let me take you where I take my own troubles ! Let me try to show you what I see so often there myself. Dear Madame, I pray of you to come ! I think that it will ease your heart. Let me take you there !”

For it was at the Maison Monastère that these words were spoken, and Lenore with a soft urgency which would brook no denial, took her guest by the hand, and led her through the cloister and into the little chapel, where a dim red light burnt before the altar, and the Reverend Mother, with one white-capped Sister, knelt at their prayers.

Lenore signed herself as ever on entrance. The Marquise stood upright for a moment, and then bent her stately head. Lenore, still clasping her by the hand, led her forward towards the spot where she herself knelt day by day, and both of them knelt at this moment side by side.

Doubtless the Reverend Mother recognized who was with Lenore. Audibly from her lips now came the oft-repeated petitions for mercy, the gentle voice of the Sister and Lenore taking up the response. Dim and very still was that little sanctuary wherein devout women knelt, steadily and softly the lamp glowed. Symbol of the Divine Love, the Divine Presence which has never left the earth, which the Son of God came to redeem from the curse.

When the voice of the Reverend Mother ceased, Lenore whispered her own petitions in half-audible tones. For her husband she prayed, for the son of that mother who knelt beside her, silent, perhaps unmoved, though neither indifferent nor irreverent. Prayer had become for Lenore of late a very accustomed exercise ; the effort of sharing it with that other was less than she had anticipated.

When they reached the house again, the Marquise possessed herself of Lenore's hands, and imprinted a kiss upon her brow.

"Thank you, my dear child," she said, "for letting me share your orisons. Although such exercises mean little to me now, there was a time . . . and I can be glad that there are still simple, faithful hearts that can find help and joy in such exercises."

"But, dearest Madame, do you not feel how near we are to God's throne, when we kneel in a place consecrated to His Son? We take from His hand that which He sends. And we look to Him in confidence and faith. Oh, can you not understand in these dark days how, though He tries us and chastens the whole world, yet always He is ready with His help and comfort for those who trust in Him? Dear Madame, we have heard that beautiful story of the angels of Mons! Of course they were there! Always they are around us, ministering to the heirs of salvation. Only we do not see them. But God lifts the veil sometimes, in moments of extremity—and men's eyes are opened! Believe me, there are angels about Leon's path and round his bed! He may not know it; but they are there. And we may ask that they be suffered to soothe and help and comfort him, so far away from his home. That is how I felt, kneeling in the little chapel—that Leon would recover. Already he suffers less. We can help him by our prayers. Can you not believe that yourself?"

"My child, time was when I could have said a fervent yes to that question. But now—what can I answer? My faith has been merged in something that once I thought higher and nobler than any teaching of the Church. Yet it does not help me now—and the other I have flung away and lost."

"Do not be afraid, dear Madame," spoke Lenore softly. "It will come back—it will come back. When Leon comes back you will understand!"

CHAPTER XIII

MAKING READY

IT was Nurse Frome's idea.

"It seems to me, my lady, if I may speak, that we ought to be getting a bit ready."

"Ready for what, Nannie?" asked Lenore with ready interest, for she knew that the nurse was a person of ideas and resourcefulness.

"For what may be coming if folks speak truth. Don't they say that those Huns are threatening to sweep the seas with their submarines, and scuttle every vessel they meet? Well, if so be they do it, as is likely, what might happen here any day? Might we not get boat loads of poor, famished, half-dying sailors? Mightn't we get wrecked soldiers from troopships coming across from Algiers, and caught by them devils? Very well then, what's to happen if such as they come ashore here? Wouldn't it be a good thing to have a place ready to receive them?"

"To be sure it would, Nannie. What a good thought! Go on; tell me more about what you have been planning—as I can see in your face you have."

"Well, just think of that great hall yonder that is never used. And think of all the beds upstairs never slept upon or like to be. I don't say have the men trapesing all over your house; but I do say, why not get some beds down along into that big empty place with the statues? You've got plenty of money to feed 'em. And I've got a pair of hands as have been used to nursing all their days. Any officers would be cared for in the town right enough. But we could make ready for the poor fellows who wouldn't be so welcome. Not but what I've no doubt folks would do their best for them. Only I've a feeling we could do better."

Lenore's face had been slowly brightening. All these

long months she had felt a great longing to bear a share in that work of service which was energizing the womanhood of all countries.

“Oh, Nannie—how I should love to do some work like that ! I think it is a splendid idea ! But I would like first to speak of it with Madame and Monsieur de Québriac. If they approve, let us begin at once. It is terrible to think what those must suffer who are turned adrift by those pirates of the deep.”

Lucien in these days was a frequent visitor at the Maison Monastère.

It was his duty to visit the gun emplacement, and to confer with the officer-in-charge. He was at once anxious that this place should be adequately protected—for there was always a half-superstitious dread of malign influences hovering about it—and yet equally desirous that no intrusion or disturbance should trouble its inhabitants.

At length upon an early autumn day, when he paid his accustomed visit, he heard a rumour which disquieted him. The officer reported that the night patrol had sighted a slinking, mist-wreathed figure gliding round the gun. All through the radiant summer nights no such apparition had appeared. But now, when swathes of vapour were apt to lie along the hill-sides in the warm somewhat heavy atmosphere incident to the season, whispers of nocturnal visitants had just begun to circulate.

“At the first I made light of it,” the officer reported. “We have all heard tales of this hill, and I would not regard the matter very seriously. But the reports continue. Of course whatever appears is said to bear the semblance of a cowled monk ; that one would expect, M. le Marquis ; for so the story always runs about this hill. For myself I have no belief in apparitions—*les revenants*. But I ask myself in these days, what if we have other foes to face ? Where are those men who escaped the vigilance of the *gens d’armes* one night a year ago ? It was thought they had reached the back of the island, and were hiding away there. But no

one has ever found them. To think that they are hidden here is of the most impossible. I and my men have searched and scoured the whole hill. Yet has it not always borne an evil reputation? Ill deeds have been perpetrated here in the past, well understood. And if in the past, why not in the present? And it is told to me that the appearance of a slinking, prowling monk, garbed in his habit and closely cowed, has often been the harbinger of some outrage."

Lucien's face was very grave, when some time later he sought Lenore.

She was in the great hall, and came forward towards him with welcoming smile.

"Lucien, you come in a good hour! But tell me, is there any new trouble? You have no ill tidings of Leon!"

"No tidings at all. The last cable relieved our fear somewhat. We trust he is out of danger, as you know. Yet my mother's heart remains heavy with the presage of fear. Lenore! Lenore! when will these days of anxious woe end?"

She could give him no answer, yet gently pressed his hand. Then she told him of her nurse's plan, and at once he became keenly interested.

"I had myself been asking what we should do were shipwrecked crews to seek asylum with us. I even went with Dr. Rodin and the Governor to look at the old Lazaretto, to see if it might be used. But it has fallen into such a condition that it would hardly serve the purpose without large sums being expended at a time when money runs low. Now this great place. What a shelter—what a refuge! Lenore, would you be able to receive and care for such as might throw themselves upon our mercy . . . ?"

It was Nurse Frome through whom the response came.

"I'm fair aching to do something with my own hands, sir, and there you have the truth. Ill or well, I'd look after them and feed them up, and my lady would see

to it they had clothes to their backs to face the world with again. When the papers come, and I read what happens on the cruel seas, my blood fairly boils. Give me a chance to try and make a bit of comfort for the poor souls! That's what will do me a lot of good—and my lady likewise!"

"Yes, Lucien, that is what I feel. I want to do things with my own hands—to take under my own roof such as have suffered such cruel hardships. I shall feel, just a little, as though I were doing it for Marcus—for Leon! Helping one is helping all. Do you know what I mean?"

He looked at her with that far-away gaze she knew so well. He spoke in low tones.

"Lenore, my mother told me where you went with her when she felt her sorrow very heavy—and what you said. I have not seen your little chapel myself. Will you take me there?"

She looked at him with a shy eagerness in her eyes.

"I would love to go there with you, Lucien. But I did not know that—you cared."

"I cannot tell you what it is I feel upon those mysteries which mean so much to you, Lenore. I bow my head in worship before things which adumbrate themselves before such eyes as yours, yet which I cannot see clearly with mine . . ."

"One day, I think, you will see them also, Lucien. I will pray that it may be so."

"Do you ever pray for me, Lenore, Lenore?"

"Always, Lucien. For I have not many in this world to love and pray for—by name. How should I ever forget yours?"

They passed together to the little chapel. The Reverend Mother and the Sisters were coming out. Lucien uncovered, and spoke to them with his gentle courtesy. He liked to know how near they were to Lenore. She was well guarded by faithful servants, devout women and the great canine companion who seldom left her side. Nevertheless, as he looked at her, feeling her so

infinitely precious, and thought of the words of the officer, a little thrill of anxiety went through him.

The peace and silence of the chapel were deeply impressed upon his spirit, as for a few minutes he knelt there, looking towards the ancient altar and its light.

Trained in boyhood by a father whose studies had led him deep into the regions of philosophical interpretation of the mysteries of life, where the faith which believes all things, hopes all things, could have no place, he was yet deeply conscious of the void which intellectualism alone leaves behind. He had been reared in an atmosphere which took full cognisance of the imperfections, the contradictions, the impurities, the debasing superstitions, and the shameless corruptions of ecclesiastical systems, without understanding much of the deep, underlying mysteries which can be only spiritually apprehended, or entering into the deep integral and eternal verities, of which these are but the trappings, which, if swept all away, still leave the shining body of Truth intact.

Here in this tiny sanctuary, in the silence of its loneliness, Lucien felt a strange stirring of the spirit. Lenore's lifted face held a revelation for him. His mother's tale had made deep impression. Her heart had been stirred to long-forgotten emotions in this little place, where for long centuries intercession and prayers had been offered. And now that the helplessness of humanity in the grip of some terrible judgment was forcing upon men thoughts to which they had long been strangers, the question was framing itself in many hearts—where to turn for consolation? Where to look for aid? And Lucien suddenly bent his head, whilst words sprang to his lips, which he only breathed in a whisper:

"Lord, let me believe! Help Thou mine unbelief."

They rose and quitted the chapel together—meeting Diana almost on the threshold, where Odin was lying.

Diana had changed a little since the news of Leon's wound had reached them. Her brightness had not

departed ; but sometimes it seemed a little dimmed. She would fall into reveries, in which an unwonted wistfulness shone in her eyes. Some days she haunted the dreamy house of the De Québriacs, following the Marquise about, helping her in all her activities, and talking ceaselessly to her of Leon. And Lenore was sure that this helped the stricken mother as nothing else could do. Perhaps she had known something before of the silent tie which existed between those two. But in the past she might have been reluctant to admit it, for, as the girl had said, her birth was not equal to that of the brother of the Marquis, whom he might so easily succeed. But in these days strange changes were abroad in the world, and many old landmarks were going under. Differences and distinctions seemed of less importance than of old ; not swept away, but more easily set aside. And Diana, whose visits had always been welcome, and her personality acceptable, now grew in some indefinite way to be almost like a daughter of the house.

At other times she would seek Lenore. And when she and her father heard of the plan of converting the great hall into an extemporized shelter for possible emergencies on the sea, both threw themselves with energy into the scheme. The doctor held conferences with "that jewel of a woman," Nurse Frome, and set about to get together stores of such simple medicaments as would probably be needed for exhausted and half-starved waifs from the waves. The Sisters offered their services whenever need should arise, and all was duly arranged and set in order before the ruthless foe had actually embarked upon the long-threatened campaign of piracy and murder, which was soon further to stain the bloody page of their annals of warfare.

It was night. A night of glorious moonlight. The summer had waned, and the soft winter of St. Cecilia's Isle had come. Rain had lashed the house and garden through the hours of a stormy day, so that Lenore had

been unable to take her usual exercise. But with the coming of night the rain-clouds had rolled away, and a full moon sailed high in a sky of velvet softness, bathing the whole world in silver light.

The beauty of it all tempted Lenore from her bed. She felt a desire for air and exercise, though she had no intention of leaving the house. For awhile, after partially dressing and swathing herself in a long soft wrapper, she stood out upon her balcony, gazing at the still loveliness about her, and inhaling subtle scents which rose from the herb garden, refreshed by the copious fall of rain.

But she wanted to move her limbs, and so she softly returned to her room, and with her faithful guard at her heels, walked forth into the corridor, which was lighted by unshuttered windows, through which white moonlight stole.

Lenore carried no light. She knew she should not need it. The moonbeams would guide her ; and she had eyes which were not easily perplexed by dimness. Also she knew every nook and corner of her great house by this time ; and to-night she only meant to descend to the great hall, and pace to and fro till her desire for exercise was satisfied. She had felt a little restless all day. It was long since she had had news from Marcus. Private cables were not allowed to pass ; and shipping had almost ceased to seek their harbour. It was almost as though she and Marcus dwelt in different worlds. And yet there were moments when he seemed strangely near—almost hovering over her. And in these moments she experienced a thrill of mingled joy and fear to which she could give no name.

If he were to be killed, she felt assured his last thought would be for her. And would it be possible that God might vouchsafe to them just a moment of reunion before the veil fell which for a space must divide them ? She prayed indeed it might be so. Yet with her simple trust in prayer's mighty power, she lived in the ardent

hope and belief that Marcus would come back to her one day. Still doubts and misgivings would sometimes arise, as they had done this day of storm and wind.

Softly she paced the great shadowy place, where now a double row of small beds, set in convenient groups between the statues, showed how far the preparations had gone for the possibilities which loomed before the horror-stricken world. Patches of white light lay upon the marble floor, and ink-black shadows made patterns on it fantastic and dense.

The hound paced up and down beside her, silent as a shadow. Her own steps made no noise even upon the marble floor. It was a long way from end to end, and here at the southern extremity the shadows clustered almost menacingly black, or so it seemed to Lenore as she vanished into them before she turned.

How long she had paced she did not know, nor how many times the blackness had swallowed her up. But as she turned in that blackness, she was aware that Odin had stepped in front of her and that he stood at gaze, his tail lashing from side to side in a curious fashion which she knew indicated anger and suspicion.

The next moment she saw a movement far down the hall. Holding her breath in amaze, she was aware of a monkish figure gliding towards her. Then Odin, uttering a bay which rang weirdly through the vaulted place, sprang forward with arrow-like swiftness towards the shadowy intruder.

CHAPTER XIV

MYSTERY

LENORE stood rooted to the spot. The deep bay of the hound rang through the great vaulted place. And she saw how the cowed figure came to a

sudden pause in its perambulations. Only faintly and dimly did she discern its outline, against one of the white marble groups of statuary. But the creature seemed to start, then to turn, then to make a swift gliding movement which carried it into black shadow.

The hound meantime was leaping forward uttering those deep-throated bays which rang so strangely through the silence of the night. It was as though the dog was about to spring upon the intruder ; for his leaping bounds covered the space with extreme swiftness, when another and more sharply terrible sound shattered the stillness of that echoing place.

Lenore saw a flash—was half deafened by the report of fire-arms. She uttered a startled cry which seemed to be repeated by a yelp of agony. Then darkness with deep silence was about here again, and she felt herself trembling in every limb, obsessed by a horror which held her for a moment rooted to the spot.

“Odin !” she cried, “Odin !”

But no faithful attendant came springing back to her side. She heard a stifled moan, and it was as though something struggled upon the ground.

“Don’t move,” she cried, as though the dog were a human creature to understand. “Wait ; I will come to you.” But she knew herself to be trembling in every limb. For where was that slinking sinister figure who haunted the place for evil ? Was he lying in wait to spring upon her ? Had he another shot in some death-dealing weapon which might next be levelled in her direction ?

And then she gave a gasp of relief. A shaft of yellow light appeared, and there was Nurse Frome with a lamp in her hand, hurrying forward with anxious mien.

“Nannie, Nannie !” she cried. “I am here—in the hall ! Oh, come to me ! I think somebody has shot Odin. Come quickly !”

She sprang towards the advancing figure. Nurse Frome uttered a cry of relief.

"To think of you being here alone! The fright you gave me! I heard the dog first and then a shot. Oh, my lady, whatever has happened? And you here all alone. You ought not to wander in this house at night without your old Nannie to take care of you."

"Oh, never mind me. Come to Odin. He is somewhere yonder in the shadows!"

Lenore sprang forward now that there was light to guide her, and next moment was kneeling beside the extended form of the great hound, who lay helplessly along the marble floor, his eyes half closed, blood oozing from a wound they could not immediately locate. But he still lived, and tried to flop his tail as Lenore knelt beside him, though he was visibly unable to lift himself.

Nurse Frome set down the light, and at once began busying herself about the prostrate hound. But before doing this she had pressed an electric button just within the door. This would summon the patrol on the ridge—it was to be used when help was needed in the house.

"Go and open the big doors wide, my dear lady. We shall have the officer-in-charge here directly. He will help us over this poor fellow. But let me see what has been done to him first. Who did it? What does it all mean? Is anyone in the house who should not be? What has happened?"

"The monk was here; but he is gone now. At least I suppose so. He slips through stone walls when his errands are accomplished. But he shot my dog first. Odin would have had him by the throat else. Where has he got to now?"

"We'll find that out when Captain Duroc comes! Yes, yes, good fellow. I'll not hurt you. See, he has a wound in the side; and his front paw is broken. The ball must have gone clean through the limb, and then lodged in his body. But we'll stop the bleeding, and do our best for him. Are those footsteps that I hear?"

"Yes," answered Lenore, "it's the soldiers coming

tearing round the house. I hear them—voices and steps, too."

Next minute there stepped into the hall the grizzled, sun-burnt officer, who with a very anxious face saluted the lady and asked for her news.

He was attended by a couple of youngish soldiers, keenly alive to a sense of peril and mystery. And as the men went forward to help Nurse Frome with the wounded dog, Lenore told her tale to Captain Duroc, who listened with grave, intent face which assumed increasingly serious lines as she proceeded.

The Captain was a native of St. Cecilia, who had done most of his military service in Algeria. When released from the army he had re-entered civilian life, had been Mayor of the town on more than one occasion, and was a respected citizen of the place. On the outbreak of war, he had tendered his services to the Government in any capacity the authorities liked to assign to him; and had resumed his military title and duties, ready to assume whatever command might be given him. The defence of the island had been a matter that had occupied much of his time and thought; and very often his nights were spent upon one of the spots where gun emplacements had been made and patrols appointed to keep watch.

The Maison Monastère was very frequently the goal of his nocturnal vigils. He and Lenore and Nurse Frome had grown into a friendly intimacy. He had told them many stories of the place and its past. He never denied that this had been a strange one. He did not entirely approve of its being inhabited now by unprotected Englishwomen; and had decided, if he ever got the chance, to speak to Lord Heristal on the subject.

Now he stood pulling at his long grey moustache, his eyes fixed upon Lenore's face, listening intently to every word of her tale, and at the end putting some pertinent questions, rapped out with a measure of imperiousness which betrayed a mind disturbed.

"You came down for exercise in the long hall, and you saw a cowed figure. Where was this figure? And what became of it?"

"When I saw it first it seemed to be stealing out of the black shadows at that end of the hall. It was like the monk whom we sometimes see in the cloister. We have told you about that before. But we have not seen him now for a long time, neither have the Sisters, who are so often there."

"I know. I have asked them to keep watch and ward, and report to me. But there has been so far nothing to report. And to-night he was here! *Sapristi!* What does that mean?"

"He stood for a moment by that group of nymphs. I do not know whether he saw me; but my dog saw him, and leaped forward at him with a great baying of anger. But he was a long way off, and you see it is not a straight run through this so-encumbered place with its beds now and other furniture and all the statues. The monk turned quickly and began to glide away. But Odin was after him with long bounds. Then the shadows at that end swallowed them both up. Next I saw a flash and heard the report of a pistol (I suppose), and then I saw and heard nothing more. But I will show you the spot the monk seemed gliding towards when the dog was after him; for I never took my eyes off him. I felt he was there for some wicked purpose; and I wanted to learn how he came and went."

"You are a brave lady, Madame! Show me."

Lenore obeyed. Together they traversed the hall. Captain Duroc whipped out an electric torch and examined every foot of the way.

"He came out of the shadows of this far end, and seemed trying to reach them once more. It was just here, I think, where Odin caught him—or was about to do so. I heard the terrible noise a dog makes before he springs. And then came the shot."

"Yes—and the dog recoiled a few paces, and fell where he now lies. Corporal, how is it with the brave fellow? Will you save his life?"

"Of a surety, mon Capitaine! I have the bullet safe out of his big carcase! I got it out with my finger—see!" and the small soldiers held it up in triumph. "It bleeds still, but what matter? We will soon stop that. And we will lift him on one of those beds—the first patient in Madame's so-gracious hospital! And I will set the leg. Am I not as good as a surgeon with all the beasts? Madame need not fear to trust me; and this good *garde-malade* is one of the best! Oh, he will do grandly, our patient! But who shot him?—and where has the villain got to?"

"That is what we must seek to discover," answered the officer, whose torch was exploring the walls and the flooring, whose hands were passing over every chink and crevice, and whose sword hilt was tapping here and there, whilst keen ears listened for any clue that might be obtained through hollow reverberations.

"Monsieur, what is it you think of this monkish figure which is seen in the Maison Monastère from time to time? Have you ever yourself seen it?"

"Never, Madame; and yet from a boy have I heard of it. All the island has heard of it. Strange tales were told in the past of this hill, where so many strange things have happened. Some regard these as myths . . . legends without foundations . . . or rather tales founded upon superstitions which linger long in districts such as these. But for me . . ."

"Yes, tell me, what have you believed?"

"I have always been of opinion that advantage has been taken of the superstitious fears of the ignorant to create an atmosphere of terror around this house, so as to scare away such as might desire to dwell there. And if this be so, the effort has often been crowned with success. Those who have tried to live here have failed. You, Madame, have now remained longer than

any of those others who have essayed life within these walls; and now they seek to eject you."

"But why? Who is it that seeks to keep the place empty? And with what motive?"

The bronzed face was set in deep lines of thought. Captain Duroc had been baulked in his investigations, and without directly answering Lenore's question turned to ask of her another of his own.

"Could this monk have left the hall by the doorway? Could he have entered by it? Can he, by any chance, have been in the house, and be there still?"

"He could not have left by the door here through which I entered or I must have seen him. For the moonlight lay bright there, and I was near. No, he was making for these shadows out of which he appeared. And there is no other door of egress except the one at yonder end which gives upon the courtyard, and is fast bolted and locked. It takes time to set it open and makes much noise. He vanished like a smoke-wreath—but his pistol spoke out with no uncertain sound!"

"There you have it! And I am glad of that shot! Yes, Madame, even though your dog is a sufferer, and I love all creatures whom the good God has given us for our protection and comradeship. For now I know what heretofore I have surmised. . . ."

"And what is that, M. le Capitaine?"

"That men and not spirits haunt this hill! That somewhere above, beneath or in some secret chambers or recesses, never as yet explored, human beings have found shelter, and carry on some dark designs of their own! Me, can I say what these are? No. But I have not lived in St. Cecilia's Island for nothing! From a boy I have heard the tales! From my childhood I have explored the place—the hill, the coast beneath—all that might give me some clue; yet have found none."

"For what do you look, then, that you have not found?"

"For a hiding-place. A place the secret of which

has been kept from generation to generation. A place where deeds of wickedness may be perpetrated unseen ; where criminals may hide themselves, safe from all pursuit. In the past such men may have been outlaws and freebooters from the African coast—who knows ? And amongst them has been handed down the secret of some place of concealment. We have had a wild, mixed population here in the past. You meet in the town and in its narrow alleys dark-skinned folk with shifty, cruel eyes. We have families here of whom little good is known. They have settled here long since ; but do not mix with our gay French natives. In the past many strange tales were told of booty brought away from Africa—and never traced or heard of more. The douaniers have again and again declared that St. Cecilia must have its nest of smugglers, as you call them in your country. Once, in the last century, false coins were being issued and passed into France in alarming quantities. And there was a search made through the island ; for it was said that they had been traced (I do not know how) to this place. And, putting together these tales, as from my boyhood I have heard them, I have always believed that somewhere in the heart of our hills a hiding-place lies which has never yet been found. And when I hear the tale of the monk who shows himself here, and works for the ejectment of the dwellers in the Maison Monastère, I say to myself, ‘ Ah ha, my good fellow, thou art at it again ! One of these days thou wilt be caught at thy pranks ; and then—*parbleu !* If I could but catch him ! ’ ”

“ What would you do ? ”

“ I would get his secret from him at the bayonet’s point ! I would find means to make him speak ! ”

“ Oh, then, M. le Capitaine,” said Lenore slowly, “ it is not that you think the monk to be always the same person ? ”

“ No, Madame ; what I think, and have thought for long, is that the habit of the monk is adopted as a

disguise for whatever miscreant may be sheltering in the hidden heart of our hills. Doubtless at the first it was easy work to scare away those who would regard the visitant as a phantom—a *revenant*. And the trick succeeded for a time, till a more robust generation came into being, who did not fear phantoms. Then other means had to be resorted to—and with success. Those who sought to dwell here were scared away. But the house was not rifled of its plenishings. That might have led to steps which would not be welcome to the evil ones. Always they have been full of cunning craft. But what I believe is that this house might become a danger to them. They want it empty. They may need it for whatever deeds of darkness they perpetrate. And in these days we do well to be on our guard. Who are the human devils let loose upon the world just now? Tell me that, Madame?"

Lenore's eyes slowly dilated.

"Are you thinking of—the Germans?"

"Who else?" spoke the soldier, his eyes flashing beneath their grizzled brows. "And look you, Madame, what is it that has happened here in St. Cecilia? We, like all other places, had our contingent of German residents! Little as we liked them, little as we trusted them, what to do when they came, settled, crawled amongst us like vermin, and in their parasitic fashion gnawed at our very vitals? Could we help it? The world was at peace. We could not chase them away. And what has been our reward for giving them of our hospitality?"

"What?" asked Lenore, who gazed upon the speaker with fascinated eyes.

He turned with a large gesture and pointed to the dog Odin, now lying in comfort, though exhausted by pain and loss of blood, upon one of the narrow beds set ready—the first patient to be admitted to that improvised hospital for refugees.

"War comes. We take precautions. But we are

outwitted. The most dangerous of those amongst us, because the most cunning, vanish—like smoke-wreaths, as Madame so aptly says. Where do they vanish? Why can they not be found? Can they have all at once and all together found a place where none can reach them? No. For years—for generations even—must they have plotted, worming their way into the secrets of the evil-doers—themselves corrupt to the core. Oh, they have been in this secret before! And with what object and aim? Do we not know how the whole world is riddled by German treachery, German guile? Even in this little island we do not escape it. Madame—take my word for it—it is a German spy who walks your house garbed in the habit of a monk. It was a German weapon that shot your dog. There are hidden foes in the heart of our hills, and beneath this very house it may be, watching and working with devilish cunning. That pistol-shot has told its tale. Would that the fangs of the dog had been quicker! But we have our hand upon one of the threads of the web of intrigue. We will unwind it in time; and then—let me but catch that monk in these hands of mine! We will wring the truth from him. And we will know what it is that works in secret here in the heart of the earth!”

Suddenly a word leaped from Lenore's lips; she knew not how or why.

“Submarines!” she exclaimed; and Captain Duroc's eyes flashed back hot fire.

CHAPTER XV

WAIFS FROM THE WAVES

TEN days later there were fifteen men occupying fifteen of the twenty beds in the great hall where the white statues stood.

At first they lay there very still ; for they were exhausted almost beyond the power of speech, and some of them were wounded.

They did not try to tell what had happened to them. They only wanted to sleep and wake, to take sips from the cups of bouillon which kind hands held to their lips, and then to sink back to sleep again.

They were soldiers from Tunis. Just that much they were able to tell. They had started in a troopship, under escort. But a storm had parted them from their accompanying cruiser. And then—a submarine had sunk them without warning.

And they must have been many days in that big, open boat, those fifteen men, who lay so still, and only wanted to sleep, and then to drink hot soup and sleep again.

It was from the three wounded men who could not always sleep for pain that those who ministered to them, in that big beautiful place, learned what was to be learned of the fearful things which had befallen them. The rest just slept and slept, smiled, spoke words of thanks and slept again.

And from his own bed in the centre of the hall the first patient, the great hound Odin, watched it all, generally lying along his side, to ease the pain of the wound ; but now and again rearing himself up upon his haunches, with his uninjured fore-paw as a prop, to stare about him, flop his heavy tail when friends approached, and watch with unceasing vigilance all that went on.

Nurse Frome was in her element. Her cheerful, bustling presence made sunshine in the quiet place, which gradually became less silent as the days passed by. At the sound of her voice, which always went in advance of her bodily presence, languid eyes began to open, pale lips would smile a welcome, eager nostrils would sniff appreciatively at the approach of savoury odours. Laughter, a little weak at first, but very true in its ring, began to be heard ; and Nurse Frome's sallies

in her best bi-lingual style were regarded as master-strokes of wit and wisdom.

Lenore would move amongst them, bending over each bed, speaking gentle words, soothing weariness and suffering by her healing touch, winning for herself that adoring love which the Frenchman, impressionable and sensitive, is so quick to bestow, however lowly his station in life, however inarticulate his untrained tongue. In his childhood he has been trained to worship womanhood in the person of the Blessed Virgin. And the habit of that simple reverence and adoration remains, making it natural to look up into a gentle feminine face of beauty with eyes full of a worshipping spirit, although in words that thought may never find expression.

Dr. Rodin made daily visits. He had the hospital (if such it could be called) under his care. The men began to look for his coming.

For he seldom came alone. Diana would enter at his side—her hands full of flowers, smiles on her face, gay words on her tongue. As Lenore resembled a ray of white moonlight, infinitely pure, gently remote, soothingly lovely, so Diana came as an embodied sunbeam—cheeks glowing, eyes alight, smiles and soft laughter on her lips.

"She is so gay, that other," they would say, "O, la, la! How she makes one to laugh! And M. le Médecin also! He is so drole, that little man; but clever!—Nom d'un chien!—but he knows a thing or two."

Odin became a personage in those days. It had been decided that he should remain in the hall, as one, at least, of its guardians. Although borne in state upon a litter into the gardens from time to time, to take the air and limp about for a short while with great dignity, his regular place was with the shipwrecked men, who would sit up in bed to snap fingers at him and crack their jokes. They called him Monseigneur le Roi, and were never

tired of his silent company. It was whispered that he had been wounded in the cause of his country, and one droll little corporal, who had won the Croix de Guerre in some Algerian campaign, insisted that this should now be attached to Odin's collar, as a tribute to his courage and devotion.

Captain Duroc laughed his big jolly laugh when he saw the decorated dog ; and the corporal, his first friend, who acted as his surgeon still, and visited him daily to adjust the splints and bandages of the broken leg, was hugely pleased.

"Ah, my children," he would say, looking round the big hall, "but you shall one day see what he can do, this great fellow ! He is the guardian of the place, well understood, and knows a thing or two."

They were a gay company in that great hall. Sometimes the good Sisters who went amongst them giving all the aid they could, wondered to see them so light of heart. For they would have to go on into that terrible vortex of war. And some had been there already. Not many had seen fighting in Europe ; but three had been, early on, in the first battle of Ypres, and, having been wounded, had been suffered to return to Algeria for a time. But as the need grew sorer, they were again called upon to face the horrors they had experienced before. And these men, who were also older than their comrades, were somewhat more grave and thoughtful, though often joining freely in the mirth of the younger men.

"Are you willing to go back to it all ?" Lenore asked of one great fellow, who had told how his wife had followed him to Africa, and was there with the little ones still.

"But, Madame, of course ; the others, they are all there *là bas*. And it is for *la Patrie*. Of course I must go. My wife knows it also. She would not hold me back if she could. Think of those other wives and women yonder in France ! Madame—I have seen !"

And his eyes would take the look which will sometimes betray things that the tongue has neither wish nor power to utter. Lenore would touch gently the hand of the man who spoke and looked like that. And her heart would fly instantly towards Marcus, her husband, who, without compulsion, save that of his own spirit, was in the thick of these hideous and unspeakable horrors. These men went forth with quiet heroism, to save the womanhood of the world. And one day—oh, surely God would suffer it to be so!—he would come back to her, and she would be able to speak to him of those things in her heart which in these times could never be trusted to paper. Ah, how she dreamed of him, as she went her way these days!

Marcus knew what she was preparing to do. She had told him, and he had given cordial approval. She never went amongst these men with her gentle words and tender looks without feeling in some impalpable way as though she were drawing nearer to her husband. They were working in the common cause. How good to feel that! And one day he would come to her; and she would show him and tell him all! But oh, how long—how long!

Madame la Marquise came often up the hill in her carriage. And when the men heard the sound of the wheels, they would look one at the other and smile.

"The great lady is coming," they would say, "coming to see us—poor little coquins of poilus!" And all those who could do so stood when she came in, and the others sat up and saluted. And only the man who was very badly wounded, and who might perhaps die there in that bed in the corner, took little heed: though his tired eyes would open for a few moments, and he would try to lift his heavy hand as the rest did.

Then the Marquise would walk round amongst them. She often had a big basket of flowers with her. Not those great masses of blossoms which others brought, but

little sprays, single rose-buds, a carnation with a frond of fern—just one delicate token for each man. And they knew that she had gathered them herself, and made the tiny nosegay for each of them. So they would take them most eagerly, and hold them to their faces to smell. And after she had gone they would get Nurse Frome to bring them little vases, and each man would set his posy where he could see it, and they would talk about the great lady who cared for them, and who had told them they should see her garden before they left, because they were all the children of France, and she was a woman of France, and loved them for all they had done and would do.

As for the man in the corner, who lay very still, and was too weak to talk, she always sat beside him for awhile—not speaking much herself, but letting him look at her. And if she saw that he was suffering, she would put her beautiful hand, glittering with rings, upon his, and hold it so for a time. And her touch seemed often to drive the pain away, because it was so wonderful that so great a lady should sit beside a poor poilu, and hold her hand upon his. And sometimes she spoke little words to him which nobody else heard. And afterwards, when she had gone, they would see his lips moving, saying them over and over again, as people can over a phrase of music which is very sweet. And once after the Marquise had left, when next Lenore bent over him, he opened his eyes and smiled and said, in a voice that was not so thin as it had always been till now:

“I am going to get better now. I must go back to fight for her. Did you see, Madame, what she did to me before she left this time? She kissed me on my brow. I feel as though she set a mark there. I had told her of my *maman*, who was dead since I went to the war. And I felt my tears run down. And she kissed me and said: ‘I also am a mother, my child; and my boy is far away amongst those who fight. I will

think that thou art my son, whom I kiss; and thou wilt think the kiss comes from thy dear mother. For motherhood is all one, is it not so?' Oh, Madame, if it should be that I die in the tumult of some great battle, I shall feel that kiss upon my brow to the very last. I shall tell my mother, when I meet her in Paradise, of the great lady who kissed her boy for her sake."

When Lenore told the Marquise what the poilu had said, her eyes shone with a soft light, and she never omitted her visit to his bedside when she came to see the men who had been rescued from the hungry sea.

Little by little they learned all that the men could tell them of what had brought them in so sad a plight to the shores of St. Cecilia. It was the all-too-common story of wanton cruelty. The scuttling of the ship might be accounted an act of war; but the subsequent firing upon the boats which escaped with their loads of almost helpless men was an outrage against the laws of humanity and warfare in civilized lands. Several boats had been sunk. Three had succeeded in making their escape in the gathering shades of night; but one had evidently been damaged, for she sank like a stone, and only a few of her occupants had been rescued. Then the other two boats had sought to keep together, and for a time succeeded. But on the morning of the terrible third day of tempest and tossing and starvation, these men had found themselves alone on the face of the heaving waters, and knew not whether their comrades had foundered or were still afloat like themselves.

Later on still, after two more terrible days of suffering, thirst and hunger, the island patrol boat had sighted them heaving helplessly on the rolling waves; and here they were, their troubles at an end, in the safe keeping of gentle kindly nurses and skilful doctors—getting ready for what might lie in store for them, but enjoying

with a whole-hearted abandonment of pleasure this blessed interlude of peace and rest.

Soon another pleasure was added to those which had been theirs from the first. A great piano was brought down from some upper room ; and when the Marquise next visited them she was not alone. A tall man in uniform, though with a slight halt in his gait, accompanied her, and after he had made the round of the beds, telling the patients how he had seen them all before, when they were asleep, but had been much occupied since then, sat down at the piano and began to play—to play in a fashion that caused a deep hush of enchantment to fall upon the hall. Men in bed sat up to listen. Men beginning to dress and sit about in comfortable chairs, made a circle about him, watching those long, lithe fingers flashing over the keys and drinking in the sounds they produced with eager delight.

Their feet would stamp to the rhythm of marches, their heads would wag and their hands keep time to the lilt of swinging measures. Sometimes, at the sound of some familiar air, they would spring up and burst into vocal accompaniment, laughing, snapping fingers and uttering cries at approved places.

Then one or another would ask for this or that song or march or hymn, and the man at the piano would instantly respond. Or if he did not know the air, the petitioner had only to hum it once through, and then it was at those wonderful fingers' ends. If a poilu broke into song himself, in an instant he found himself accompanied and supported by just the right harmonies, together with little trills and cascades of soft notes, which brought new meanings into its phrases. Altogether the time passed in a wonderful and charming fashion, and when the Marquis rose at length from the instrument, voices rose on all sides begging that he would come again.

"Certainly, my friends," he answered, "I will assuredly do so, and very gladly. And I will do more. For I

will beg of your hostess to sing for you. Until you have heard her, some of you may well feel that you have never known what music was like before."

His glance sought that of Lenore, who had stolen in to listen to the improvised concert, and their eyes met with that gladness of mutual understanding which was growing up between them so surely.

How happy she was to do them this pleasure! A few days later Lucien came again, and then how tensely still the great hall was, as her beautiful golden voice rose and fell, sometimes like a skylark winging its way heavenwards, then low and infinitely sweet and tender, as the murmur of the west wind across a dreaming sea. She sang them little lilting chansons of France. She sang English ballads, tender and sweet, speaking to them beforehand of the meaning of the words she was about to use. And again would rise through the reverberating spaces about her the notes of some grand choral, such as she and Lucien alike loved.

And those men, who had heard nothing like it before, and never might again, those men whose lives had been rough and who were going away into the storm-clouds of war, held their breath whilst they looked and listened, watching her face, watching his face, both of them transfigured by the passion of their love for these glorious sounds. And all would feel, though they never sought to say it, that they had been carried up almost to the gates of Heaven, which had opened just a little way to let out those celestial harmonies.

"Madame should surely be the wife of M. le Marquis," the men would whisper one to the other when they were alone again. "But it is said that Madame's husband is English—that he is a great milord and fighting in our country against the Germans. And that she is here to be safe from them. Pray Heaven their evil ships come not near these coasts!—nor their so crafty slinking submarines! Or, if they do come, let it be whilst we are here! Oh, if we might, before we go, strike a blow for

these ladies and our good Marquis ! Surely that would be very good—only better still that need should never arise. But who can say ? ”

As for Lucien and Lenore, when they had gratified their audience to its hearts' content, and had been driven away by Nurse Frome, that Lenore might rest her voice, and that she herself might give “her big boys” their tea, they would wander forth together into her gardens, and beguile a very happy hour with gentle intimate talk.

How he loved to pace beside her, watching her bent face, and speaking to her of many of those thoughts which flocked into his mind. When with her these seemed stimulated to new intensities of significance. She meant so much in his life ! He could not envisage a future which did not hold her very near to him.

“Lenore,” he once said, when they had been singing some of those wonderful sacred mass words which crystalize the beliefs of a thousand generations, “What does it all mean to you ? What does it say to your heart ? The music surges over mine, it lifts me up into the highest spheres of ecstasy. But with you I feel that the words mean so much more.”

“They do, Lucien, they do ! Do you not yourself begin to understand ? ”

He gazed at her, his soul in his eyes.

“No, at this moment I do not understand. But Lenore, I begin to desire that comprehension. How am I to attain it ? ”

“Ah, Lucien, how can I answer that question ? But indeed, if you desire, I think you will attain.”

“Lenore, will you be my teacher ? ” he asked in gentle humility.

“Ah, Lucien !—who can tell ? There is only One . . . and yet we may help one another. And indeed I would love to help you if I could. You who have helped me so much ! ”

CHAPTER XVI

JEAN PITOU

JEAN PITOU was the name of the poilu who had been wounded, and who always lay so very still in his shadowy corner. They had put him there in that corner because it was the quietest place in the big hall, and he was sheltered by a great group of statuary as well as by a screen, which often stood at his bed's foot when he was suffering.

Close beside him was that little strong door which led into the cloister. For the cloister lay behind the great hall, as has been said ; but they had not known of this door until the hall was prepared for the men who might come there to be cared for, as it had been masked by the heavy statuary group, which now shut away Jean Pitou from the rest of the hall.

The group had been pulled out with considerable difficulty at the instigation of Captain Duroc, who had been extremely interested in the discovery that behind it, in that very corner towards which the prowling monk seemed making his way, was a door, hitherto unsuspected and unknown. Yet when it had been unmasked, it had furnished no solution to the problem of the intrusion of the cowled monk ; for the door opened inwards only, and could by no possibility have been moved whilst the pedestal of the marble group fixed it fast.

Moreover, it was fastened by three huge bolts on the inside, and these were so encrusted with rust that it was a work of time to force them back in their sockets. Now, however, they worked easily, and the door was furnished with a huge, old-fashioned key, which was found on the place. Use was sometimes made now of this easy egress to the cloister and chapel. Jean Pitou was a good Catholic. Father Augustin, who came daily to see the men and talk with them, spent much time with this

devout son of the Church. And often when he was about to celebrate his Mass in the chapel, where now he gathered together a small congregation, Jean would beg that the door might stand open, beside which he lay, that he might catch a few of the familiar sounds that should tell him what was passing within the little sanctuary. At the sound of the tinkling bell he would cross himself whilst his lips moved in prayer. Others watching him would do the like ; and soon all who were able would file out of the little door whenever the Abbé was known to be saying some office in the chapel. And to Lenore this came to mean very much. How beautiful it was that here, in this spot where legends clustered thickly, and tales were told of evil as well as of good, it now seemed as though the powers which wrought on the side of the angels were at work for the uplifting of those who sought shelter here. The holy spell of that tiny sanctuary and all that it stood for was pressing home some message into the hearts of these rough soldiers. And when the time should come for them to continue their journey, and pass into that red cloud which was swallowing up the manhood of the world, they would go with hearts full of courage and steadfast devotion, armed by that strength which is from above, and which grows and shines in times of stress and peril—shines more and more unto the perfect day.

The Reverend Mother and the two good Sisters, who gave of their care and skill to all who needed it, took an especial interest in Jean Pitou. And great was their joy when he took a turn for the better, and was able first to sit up in bed, then to leave it for a few hours at a time, and lastly, with the strong help of two of his comrades, to limp along the cloister to the little chapel, and from a specially prepared place at the back take part in the celebration of those holy mysteries which meant so much to him.

Yet it seemed that he had pushed the matter on a little too fast. Dr. Rodin had advised patience and

yet a little more patience before he made the attempt. But Jean had begun to fret at his imprisonment, and was given his own way. And then, unhappily, a sudden relapse stretched him again weak and suffering on his bed.

"But what matter?" he asked of those who would have condoled with him. "Was it not worth it? I have seen the light which never fails. I have heard the words which purify and heal. What matter the weakness of this poor body? My soul and my spirit are filled with health and joy."

The priest and the good Sisters rejoiced in this spirit. The Marquise listened to his words with a strange, sad light in her beautiful old eyes.

"Truly, my child, I can rejoice that thou shouldest feel thus. Yet for me, I would hold it the higher and the wiser course to keep thy body in strength and soundness. To what end suffering which need not have been? Answer me that! And if it were to keep thee back when thy comrades go forward to take up their duties for their country—how then?"

A little look of perplexity and distress clouded the eyes of Jean Pitou, and Lenore, who stood beside the Marquise, and had heard what passed between them, gently put in her word:

"I think, dear Madame, that Jean would try and tell us, could he find the words, that he is a little sorry for the impatience of spirit which urged him to make efforts somewhat beyond his strength; yet he would also say, I doubt not, that the joy and refreshment which were his in that hour transcend all that he suffers now. And that also in suffering he can find solace and strength, for is there not another special blessing upon those who are found worthy to fill up the measure of the sufferings of Christ!" And as she spoke Lenore's eyes kindled, whilst the face on the pillow took on a happy and even transfigured look. His eyes sought those of the Marquise almost with an expression of triumph.

"That is it!" he whispered. "Madame now understands!"

The old face was very tender, the eyes very soft; but there was unfathomable sadness in their depths.

"Sleep now, my child; thou art weary," she said, as the tired eyes closed. Then, as she rose with her hand upon Lenore's arm, she spoke a few words in a low, sorrowful voice.

"Alas!—that is what I do not understand. Time was when I might have believed that I did. Those happy illusions and visions of youth! How can they be recalled when once they have fled? Cherish yours, my child, as long as you may. For, believe me, nothing can ever replace them once they are lost. And nothing can recapture the glamour when it is gone. Be happy in your dreams whilst you may."

"And may it not be that the dream will one day prove the reality; when the things which seem to have been the reality roll up like a scroll and vanish away?"

But Lenore waited for no answer to her question. She was always a little shy and timid with the Marquise when these subjects came uppermost. She longed unspeakably to bring to that clouded spirit some realization of the glorious light behind. She knew that there was a sense of bitter loss in that unsatisfied heart. She traced again and again in her words a conviction of the hollowness of the intellectual energies which once had been so satisfying to her soul, lifting her into an atmosphere of clear philosophic certainty which regarded with compassion those who dwelt still amongst the mists of superstition and tradition. For years she had dwelt very serenely upon her heights. She had thought to remain there in quiet satisfaction through all her life.

Now this standpoint had changed, as all the values of life were changing and shifting with the tumult of a world at war. Her spirit was asking questions for which her philosophies and systems could supply no answer.

Her mind was adrift upon a dim dark sea, and she was seeking a haven of rest whilst still turning from the Light which would guide her into it. And this was partially known to Lenore, who longed to help and comfort her, yet felt unspeakably young and immature, when confronted by the grave deep eyes of the woman who had lived so long and thought so deeply.

By this time all the inmates of the house, save only Jean Pitou, were restored to normal conditions of health. But they still remained her guests. Cables were passing to and fro on the subject of these stranded soldiers; and before long a vessel would call in and fetch them away. Meantime it was the kindly desire of the inhabitants of St. Cecilia to give them a few happy weeks, in which to make up to them for the awful experiences through which they had passed; and many were the invitations they received and availed themselves of, though always returning with contentment and pleasure to the *Maison Monastère* at night.

Thus it came about that Jean Pitou was left often for many hours of the day alone in the great hall, with the hound as his companion. Odin was fast becoming convalescent himself, and was able to limp solemnly to and fro between his own couch and the open doors into the court, or across the marble floors, where many rugs were now laid down, towards the bed where the soldier lay, with whom he was now on very friendly terms.

Often he stretched his huge length along the floor beside the bed, with his head upon the pavement. And Jean Pitou was occasionally aroused from the dreamy condition in which he lay for long hours together, half-waking, half-sleeping, by the curious sounds which proceeded from the throat of the great dog.

Odin, who would lie on his side, his ear resting on the marble squares of the pavement, would start a low rumbling murmur somewhere deep down in his throat, which sometimes swelled almost into a growl, sometimes sank

away into silence. At first Jean paid little heed to this ; but gradually he came to notice and feel curious. When in other parts of the hall, though he often lay in the same way on his side, the dog never uttered these rumbling protests, as they seemed to be. Jean Pitou would sometimes question his companion.

"What is it then, good fellow ? What dost thou hear ? For me, I can only hear the songs of the birds without, and the splash of the fountain in the courtyard. What is it then that disturbs thee ? Canst tell me, good comrade ? "

But Odin could only lift his head and gaze ; or perhaps give vent to a long-drawn bay.

One afternoon Jean Pitou was quite alone in the hall, Odin being outside in the garden with his mistress. Dr. Rodin, coming in to see him, found him out of his bed, on the floor, in so strange an attitude that at first he thought the man had tried to get up and had had a seizure ; but soon saw that this was not the case.

"My good fellow, what is the matter ? " he asked, as he got his patient back to bed with all speed. His eyes were unnaturally bright, and he seemed breathless with excitement.

"But tell me then, M. le docteur—what do they do then, down *là-bas*, under this hall ? What is that noise that the great dog hears so often ? And once or twice in the night I have heard it myself—and again now. Tink—tink—tink ! Like a hammer on a blacksmith's forge. Tink—tink—tink. Who is it that works down there below ?—I had thought the house to be built on the solid rock."

Intensely alive to what this suggestion might mean, Dr. Rodin closely questioned his patient. He himself, his ear against the pavement, listened and listened and listened. But he heard nothing. He examined afresh the whole structure of the walls and floors, as he had done many times before ; but he could find nothing

to account for the sounds described. Already many surveys of the place had been made by skilled engineers to see if there were caverns beneath the house in which surreptitious activities could be carried on. Of old tradition had told of strange happenings upon this hill, and with the outbreak of war all normal vigilances had been redoubled. But no discovery had followed. The Maison Monastère kept its secret—if secret it held. But what then were these sounds of which Jean Pitou spoke? What was it that he and the dog either heard or thought they heard?

There was undoubtedly a little fever about the man. The Reverend Mother at this moment unlocked the cloister door from without and entered. Latterly this had been her usual mode of ingress. For Jean Pitou required at least one visit from a nurse during the night, and it had been arranged between the Sisters and Nurse Frome that one of these *religieuses* should look in upon him at midnight, after they left the chapel, where they always went to keep the appointed office. His bed being so close to the door, there was no disturbance for the other patients, who were used to hearing the sound of the key and the murmur of voices in the dim corner.

Dr. Rodin drew her to the cloister with him after her ministrations were accomplished, and told her what the man had said.

"Is it the figment of a fevered brain, *ma mère*?" he asked, "or can he have heard aught for which we cannot account? For myself, I heard nothing, though he believed he had been listening to strange sounds for long."

The Reverend Mother slowly shook her head. Her eyes looked very wise.

"Of a truth, M. le docteur, I cannot tell. For myself, I have no fears of this house or place. The good God will protect His children from that which is evil or malign or impure."

" Yes, yes, my saintly mother, I am not disputing that, when spectres and spells are in the case. But what if we are ' up against ' (to use the British phrase) some other forms of evil ? Captain Duroc and I are on the war-path for other game than phantom monks. What if we should find ourselves on the track of concrete foes, who are hiding themselves in our very midst ? Do not all countries teem with the evidences that often this is found possible ? "

Very grave was the face the Reverend Mother turned towards him. It was a suggestion fraught with a certain terror to all in these days. A foe in their midst, unseen, undetected ; a foe who might already have struck—who might strike again. And this time it might be a victim other than a dog who would fall by his hand.

" Oh, sir, is it that which you think ? But the house is so straightly watched and guarded now. Who would dare to approach it with evil intent ? "

" Perhaps none. We need not fear too much. As you say, it is admirably defended ; and a sick man's fancies are not always to be trusted. We must not put too much credence upon Jean Pitou's surmises. We will care for him well, and perhaps he will hear no more of the noises which he fancies arise from the heart of the hill."

That night the great hall lay wrapped in sleep. The poilus, pleasantly fatigued after a day of mild amusement in the town, and a walk round Lucien's gardens, were soundly sleeping. Jean Pitou slept more lightly, often waking with a start, and lying gazing about him, listening intently, he scarcely knew why.

Odin slept also, upon his accustomed bed ; and deep silence reigned in that still place of moonlight and shadows.

There came the sound of a soft step without. Jean Pitou smiled. It was one of the Sisters or the Reverend Mother who came to see if all were well with him, and

bring him one of those soothing draughts prepared from healing herbs, which almost always lulled him off into sound slumber when he had taken it, even though he might have been somewhat restless up till then. He lifted himself upon his elbow and looked towards the door close at hand.

The key grated softly in the lock. One patient in that place besides Jean Pitou heard it ; for one man was only dozing lightly. He was thirsty himself. Perhaps he would ask the Sister for a drink when she had tended her patient. He could see half-way into the recess, this other, where Jean Pitou's bed was set. He too leaned up on his elbow. A tiny *vielleuse* burned in the recess, shedding a very dim light around. The convalescent heard the grating of the key in the lock. He could not see the opening door, but saw the blackness of the robed figure beside Jean Pitou's bed. He heard the man's low voice speaking a welcome. And then his eyes were attracted elsewhere. For Odin suddenly sprang up into a sitting posture, lifted his great head, sniffed up the air, and broke into a tremendous bay which woke the whole ward.

Men sprang up, the wakeful one first of all ; but the hound was before them, only his movements were less swift than of yore ; for his foreleg was still tightly bound.

The door slammed to. The key was turned. There was a rush towards Jean Pitou, who had not made a sound.

They found him lying on his back ; his glazing eyes turned upwards, whilst crimson stains were spreading slowly over the whiteness of his night garb. His heart was transfixed by the thrust of a dagger, the handle of which stood up strange and glittering from his lifeless and slowly stiffening body.

CHAPTER XVII

THE UNSEEN HAND

AT once the house was in a state of tumult. Bells rang, calls echoed up and down the great staircase. Nurse Frome was quickly on the spot. Soldiers hammered at the great door to be let in. Lights flashed hither and thither. Messengers started hot-foot for the town and across the broken country in the direction of Dr. Rodin's house. Guards were set. Every man in that hall became for the nonce a soldier, alert, watchful, resolute. Many among them had heard tales of the Maison Monastère and its sinister reputation in the past; but they had regarded these legends as children regard the fairy tales which entrance whilst they do not materially affect the course of their lives.

And now, in their very midst, in the dead of night, a dastardly deed had been accomplished. Their good comrade, whom all regarded with affection and regard, had been done to death in mysterious fashion whilst they lay sleeping around him. Jean Pitou lay on his back, his sightless eyes half open. No one had touched him, save Nurse Frome, who could only shake her head and endorse that word which had already passed their lips.

"Dead!"

Yes, dead without a struggle or a cry. Smitten to the heart by a treacherous hand. The miscreant had stolen up to him in the garb of saintly womanhood; and before he had been able to utter a word, at the moment when the great hound had issued a warning note, the sharp blade had quivered in his heart, and he had died with the smile on his face which had been his greeting for the Reverend Mother. Oh, the hideous irony of such a fate!

But how had the murderer possessed himself of that key? There was no doubt as to the method of his entrance. The door from the cloister had been unlocked and opened; and the moment the deed had been accomplished the miscreant had slipped out and locked it afresh behind him. The infuriated soldiers made a resolute attack upon that door; but so strong was it, that their united efforts scarcely shook it on its brazen hinges. Nurse Frome turned round and bid them desist.

"We must go to the Reverend Mother. It may be that some devil has been at work over there. Her key—her black robes; come some of you lads and go with me. It may be that other deeds of shame than this one have been done to-night. Who will go with me and see?"

Every man was at her service; but she only took three. Lenore was already standing amongst them, like a white wraith. Captain Duroc and his men had just been admitted. He took instant command of the situation. He listened to the torrent of words which descended upon him the moment he arrived, and he told off one of his own men to accompany the small party who were to visit the home of the Sisters and learn how it was with them.

Lenore slipped her trembling arm through that of the staunch old nurse, whose English courage was so often the admiration of the excitable Frenchmen.

"Come then, my lamb, you'll be best away from that place and all those men. It's a bad night's work has been put through by some fiend; but we'll catch and hang him yet!"

A murmur of approval from the grim-faced men showed that they had caught the meaning, if not the actual words spoken. They were talking together in low fierce tones. Jean Pitou—so good a comrade, so full of pious thoughts, respected and loved of all—for him to be singled out as the victim of this outrage. One who lay weak and ill,

who could not make a fight for his life ! And to be fallen upon thus—in dastard fashion—by one who wore the garb of a holy Sister of Mercy ! *Nom d'un chien !*—there was only one nation who could breed such miscreants !—there must be Germans even here—vermin—that crawled and swarmed the earth over ! Where were they not, these pests of humanity ? But if they had hurt the good Sisters and the Holy Mother—*parbleu !*—hanging would be too good if ever they had their hands upon them !

Just as the little party reached the green courtyard round which the cloister partly ran, they were aware of the opening of the chapel door ; and the flood of moonlight revealed the tall, stately form of the black-robed Reverend Mother with the two Sisters, one on either side. They had concluded their midnight orisons, and the former was about to pay her customary visit to the patient in the great hall. They saw that in her hand she held a large key. Then it was not her key which had served the murderer a brief quarter of an hour earlier !

Lenore, fleet of foot, and moving as softly as a moonbeam, had her arms round the neck of the Reverend Mother, who held her closely, gazing over her shoulder at the soldiers and others who were advancing towards them.

“ But what then has happened ? ” she asked in her level tones. “ What is it that is amiss in yonder house ? ”

They told her, the men standing sternly a little apart, with watchful eyes searching the lights and shadows of the cloister, as though suspicious that even there lurking foes might conceal themselves. The Sisters uttered little cries of horror and woe. The Reverend Mother stood up straight and tall, holding Lenore in her arms.

“ What is it you tell me ? ” she said, “ entering yonder door with my key, in my habit, and striking to death that good Jean Pitou ! Holy Mother of God, protect us from such evil deeds of darkness ! ”

"Reverend Mother," spoke the soldiers from the plateau, who knew these gentle women well. "Pray you come with us to yonder door with the key I see in your hands. Let us try if it be indeed the right one you hold; or whether that fiend who smote Jean Pitou has stolen it and substituted another in its place."

It was a new thought, and they all moved along towards the cloister. As they neared the door one of the men sprang forward, and bent over some dark object lying on the ground. For a moment all hearts beat furiously. Was it some other victim of ruthless violence? Then the man turned and held up the black mass he had stooped over. It was a black habit, like to that worn by the Reverend Mother. Whoever it was that had slipped away through the door after committing his dastardly crime had, either through haste, fear, or from some other motive, dropped the trappings which had formed so adequate a disguise, and had left them where they lay.

"Reverend Mother, is this indeed your habit?" asked the man.

She shook her head. She owned but the one she stood up in now. This was a counterfeit, but it had served its purpose all too well.

Drawing near to the door with her key, she fitted it into the lock and it turned noiselessly. The other key had grated as it turned. Hers she had oiled so well that she could use it without fear of disturbing her patient close at hand, should he be sleeping.

They opened the door, to be confronted by a strange scene within. Dr. Rodin was already there. The messenger had lighted on him very near at hand, as he had been abroad upon one of his many errands of mercy to the scattered peasants of the island, who were wont to send for him in matters of emergency. All turned to gaze as the door swung open. The Reverend Mother stepped in with great dignity, and stood beside the bed upon which the dead man lay, signing him with the holy

symbol, and then with perfect simplicity and self-forgetfulness kneeling beside the bed.

The Sisters followed her example, and many of the men standing round. Although life was extinct, yet in a low tone and with earnest devotion she commended the spirit so lately flown into the hands of the Triune God. In the grand, yet simple words of the great Mother Church which commits into that holy keeping every soul amongst her sons and daughters, claiming fearlessly for them the welcome of the great hierarchy of saints who have gone before, the faithful woman, in the absence of other authority, committed that spirit to its last rest. The Sisters followed with moving lips, though inaudible voice, and Lenore with clasped hands and bent head knelt beside her in an ecstasy of devotion. Surely in this place, where terrible things could happen—had happened, there brooded yet some sacred influence, some celestial benediction, which might surely serve—if rightly used—to ward off the powers of darkness!

When she rose from her knees, it was to find Dr. Rodin's hand upon her arm. With his other hand he touched the shoulder of the Reverend Mother.

"Take her away with you, *ma mère*," he said, "keep her safe with you for a while. This is not the place for her just now. Take her away with you—to the chapel—to your own home, out of the horror of it all. I will see her again when day comes. But let her spend the rest of the night with you."

Lenore desired nothing better. She felt imperative need for thought—for prayer. They made their way to the little chapel, and there offered up prayers for the departed spirit which had winged its way from time to eternity with such appalling swiftness.

"Yet I am assured he made a good end," spoke the Reverend Mother later on, when they sat together towards daybreak in their little parlour, so austere, so simple, so spotlessly clean, and now owning a very few simple comforts which Lenore had pleaded with them to

accept at her hands. "He had made his communion after confession not so long ago. He was happy in his faith and love. I have no fears for him. His end was peace, although it came to him so strangely, so awfully. And yet I often think that there is no sudden death for those who love the good God, and seek to follow in the footsteps of His Son. Surely the Holy Mother looks with special love upon such, and pleads for them with great power."

They sat round the simple board, and broke their fast together. Then the Sisters slipped away to their round of daily duties, whilst Lenore with earnest gaze sought the Reverend Mother's counsel; for there was much upon her heart at this moment.

"I have been thinking of it a great while now, *ma mère*, though in the absence of my husband I know that I cannot take any such step. I must have his approval and consent. But in my heart I am asking continually, is it right for me to own this place? Once it was the property of the Church. It was dedicated. It was the home of holy men who served their Mother here. It was torn from them by violence and cruelty. Whether some of them had done ill and brought that doom upon themselves I cannot tell. It is possible. Yet does that make it right that the place should pass into secular hands, and be put to secular uses? The thought troubles me. And see—is it not as though some curse brooded over the house? Is that a sign . . . ?"

But the Reverend Mother lifted her hand in a gesture which brought Lenore to a standstill. Only her eyes continued to ask her questions.

"My child, let us not confuse issues. That deeds of violence and evil have taken place in this house, is known to all. That an evil reputation has come to cling about it is also the truth. What would you? We live in evil times; and the violence of man increaseth daily. But whatsoever the motive may be which drives these evil ones to their crimes, be very sure that it is not their

desire to see this place restored to holy uses! They desire it for themselves and their unholy traffic, whatsoever that traffic may be. That is what I have ever thought, and think still. Do not give way to them. Let us meet their machinations with the courage of those whose hearts are pure, whose minds are set on holy things! If in thy spirit, my daughter, thou dost receive a revelation from on high, that is a matter for thee to discuss alike with thy husband and with the Church. But to be disturbed by the violence of wicked ones—that is not meet for the children of the light. . . .”

Lenore’s face suddenly kindled with a sweet brightness. And then into her eyes there crept a new look, half sad, half wistful, and very mystically sweet, which the eyes of the Reverend Mother did not easily interpret. She put a gentle question.

“Of what dost thou muse then, my child?”

“Dear Mother, to none but to thee could I speak of it! Yet knowing as I do the sore peril in which my husband dwells, and when I think of all those wives and mothers who will never again in this world see their dear ones more, the thought comes to me, What if my case be like theirs? What if in God’s ordering for us I be left a widow before I am truly—a wife?”

“Ah, my child. It is well that we prepare ourselves for that which God’s providence may order for us, though ever we may pray in patient confidence and joyful hope for that earthly reunion which in His mercy He may permit.”

“I do—I do! I long to see my husband again, to feel his strong protecting arms about me! But yet I have to prepare myself for what God may send me. And if he comes not back, another whom I do not know will take his name and honours, though I also shall have ample means. And I have thought whether in such a case I would dedicate my life, even as yours are dedicated, to perpetual virginity, to vigil and prayer,

here in this place which once was hallowed to such purposes. Could I gather about me holy women, driven from their cloistered homes? Could we bring them here, under your rule, Reverend Mother, and dwell here on this hill in a happy community, tending the sick, teaching little children, keeping the sacred offices in the chapel, re-establishing there those holy acts of worship ordered of God in His Holy Church? And could we not thus cleanse this place of all that is evil? So rendering our lives pleasing unto Him, and of good report in the world?"

The Reverend Mother sat with her head bent, thinking deeply. Presently she raised it and looked gently into Lenore's earnest face.

"My child, these are great and beautiful things of which thou dost speak. And if they be of God, His blessing will assuredly follow, and a fuller revelation. But for the time hold silence, commune with thine own spirit and be still. I will pray that thou receive guidance and grace. We are not left alone in darkness or perplexity if our minds seek to be brought into true communion with the Eternal Mind of the Most High."

* * * * *

Later that same day the carriage of Madame la Marquise drove up to the Maison Monastère, and Lenore was bidden to make ready for a brief visit to the Dream House of the De Québriacs.

"It is better, my child, for you to be absent from this place for some days. There will be much that is painful for you here, and there is to be a survey of the whole house and its environs. It will be well for you to be elsewhere. So I have come to fetch you. Some of your boys are leaving also. Indeed, it is thought well to clear the house for the brief time the survey will take. And invitations pour in from all sides. Your guests will be well cared for down below in the town. Every day might now bring the ship which will carry them away to France. Poor lads! They have had a

happy interlude here on this hill. But they are ready for the call of duty—which will come soon.”

How soon it was to come none of them guessed. But the Maison Monastère was placed under direct military control for the time being, and the shipwrecked soldiers, who had been there for above three weeks were marched to fresh billets down below. They were suffered to see their comrade laid to rest, and fire a salute above his grave. And then new friends appeared to claim them, and they were absorbed into other hospitable homes.

As for Lenore and her nurse attendant, they found themselves in happy surroundings in the place Lenore had come to love well. Lucien met her on its threshold with smiling eyes and gentle words of welcome. And she found herself content to be there.

With the decline of the day they were all out upon the terrace, when Diana flew towards them with flushed cheeks and shining eyes.

“I had to come! Have you heard! A ship making the harbour! And oh, if a ship comes here from France—do you not see? There is just a chance!”

She had no need to finish; for they understood her well. And indeed what need for words? A sound of galloping hoofs broke upon their ears. Lucien sprang up, and Diana swept round with a great glory in her eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII

ENCHANTMENT

L EON was in their midst. How tall he seemed to have grown! Tall like a young poplar-tree, so slim, so thin! One arm supported in a great sling, carried in a way that showed sad helplessness. His face fallen away, so that the bones seemed everywhere visible. But such a light in the sunken eyes.

“Maman—Maman ! Chère p'tite Maman. Ah !—comme je t'aime !”

“Mon fils ! Mon fils !”

He was folded in her arms. The tears which (save perhaps in secret) she had not shed when she knew him lying wounded and alone in fair France, now rained down her cheeks. He had his right arm about her, holding her close. His head was bent over her, and there was a catch in the voice which kept repeating that one tender word—“Maman, Maman !” Lenore, with her own eyes filled with tears of sympathy and happiness, moved slowly away to the far end of the terrace. The scene was too sacred and intimate, she felt, for the eyes of a stranger to dwell upon.

Diana caught the meaning of her act, and she moved a little away herself. But not so far as did Lenore. She paused about half-way between, standing with her hands upon the balustrade of the terrace, her eyes shining with a great light ; her heart singing a triumph song of glory and praise. Leon had come back to them ! What else in the wide world mattered ? For the moment the fall of empires, the cataclysm of creation itself, seemed affairs of no account. For Leon was safe—and had come back to them !

When she dared to look again it was the brothers who were holding to each other, not ashamed to show their joy, quite untroubled by self-consciousness as they embraced once and again. The murmur of happy voices reached her ears. Oh, when would her turn come ? And what would be his greeting to her ? It was so long since they had parted ! And yet it might only have been yesterday ! Time was swallowed up in this overwhelming moment of joy. For had not Leon come back—as from the dead ?

Now he strode towards her. She stood with hands clasped against her breast. Oh, the radiant light in the eyes she turned towards him.

“Leon, Leon, Leon !”

He reached her as she stood, supporting herself against the balustrade, for suddenly her limbs felt weak. He had possession of her hands now, and was holding them fast in his.

"Diana of my dreams!" he said, looking down at her with a light in his eyes which intoxicated her with an unbelievable sense of rapture. "Only more beautiful even than in my dreams. Diana, did you know how often you came to me?"

"I know that always you have been in my thoughts. . . ."

"Have I also been in your prayers, Diana?"

He asked the question with great simplicity; and somehow it did not sound strange upon his lips at that moment, although in that house there had never before been much account taken of prayer.

"That was Lenore Heristal's doing," she answered, "when my heart was near to breaking. It was so terrible—not to know! One did not know how to think or how to speak. And with her it was in measure the same. For her husband was there, and from day to day she did not know—one scarcely dares to guess. . . ."

"Yes, that is well understood. But what, then, was it she taught you—to help the heartbreak?"

"She let me go with her into that little chapel, where she prayed for her husband, for you, for all of them. At first I only listened, for to me it meant not much. But the Sisters were often there. You saw their faces. and I saw Lenore's face too. And the light burned on and on—that watching, wonderful light, keeping guard always and for ever. And sometimes Father Augustin would come with his server. I had never valued the Mass before—I think I had, just a little, despised it. But when I saw the incense cloud going up and up—when I heard those words spoken which link earth and Heaven—at last, Leon, I, too, began to understand. And I began to pray. Ah, and it helped—it helped!"

"Yes, it helps," he answered very quietly; "I had

that lesson to learn myself out yonder. We were learning it together, Diana—was it not so? Perhaps that was why I saw you so often in my dreams. We want the prayers of our dear ones, over yonder, we others. When I go back, Maman must pray for me. I am going to ask it of her. Then I shall not feel so far away. That will make me very happy.”

“Leon, Leon! wilt thou have to go back?” spoke Diana with a catch in her voice.

He smiled with a touch of the gay gallant courage which had been his characteristic from boyhood.

“But, of course, I go back—when this arm of mine will let me³; and your good father will work for that I know, and make a sound man of me again. Oh, not just yet. We have time before us—golden, happy summer weeks! When we can forget the war and its horrors, and live in our land of dreams. “*Le Pays du Tendre*,” he softly added, “where we all so love to wander. But take me to Lady Heristal. I have not yet spoken with—Lenore!”

How joyous a thing was this coming of Leon to the House of Dreams!

How beautiful it was to watch his tender love for his mother, for his brother—and also for Diana! Lenore saw it in his eyes from the first—that golden, glorious love! And when, as the dreamy, beautiful days slipped by one after the other, and sometimes she and he were alone together, he began sometimes to speak with her as a brother might, or a friend of long standing; for in her sympathy and understanding he seemed to find great joy.

He spoke to her of that shadow which had haunted his youth, and which, in some strange way this war had lifted from his spirit.

“I have saved him from that hell,” he told her once. “For of a surety he would have gone thither. And when I learned what war could mean, I was able to be thankful that he was spared. For in truth I believe it would have

killed him ! Even as a boy he was full of keenest sensibilities. He shrank from the sight of blood. He suffered in the very sight of suffering, and he would pale even at the hearing of tales of horror. Yes, when I reached the war-zone the cloud upon my own life lifted ; and I felt that instead of having destroyed the life of my brother, my rashness, through the mercy of God, had saved him."

Those were very beautiful, golden, glorious days in that peaceful, happy home. The ship which had brought Leon, took away the shipwrecked soldiers Lenore had befriended, and left a large leisure, for the moment, in the lives of those who had worked for them and tended them in their time of need.

Just for the time being the turmoil of war seemed very far away from this sunny island. Flowers bloomed, the alleys of the garden dreamed in the glowing warmth, and a happy mother walked there with her two tall sons, and with those beautiful girls who had entwined themselves about her heart-strings.

How good were those spicy scents which stirred the golden air. Leon would lift his head to inhale them a hundred times a day. " This is France," he would say softly, " beautiful France, at peace and happy." And he would watch the peacocks strutting in the sunshine, and the doves circling overhead with crooning sounds, as they gathered to pick up the grain which was scattered for them. He was not very strong yet ; and the shattered arm and shoulder gave him pain at times. Yet his happiness was a thing beautiful to see ; and he loved the quiet hours he spent with them all, and especially that evening hour, when music sounded from within, and Lucien with Lenore flooded the bloom of the twilight with glorious harmonies. By that time Diana had generally gone home. Her father, who came daily to treat electrically the wounded, helpless arm, that responded splendidly to his remedial measures, would take her back with him ; though the next morning would generally find her here

again, ready to walk or read and do for Leon that which he suffered her.

But this soft evening hour was kept sacred to his mother, and the Marquise almost lived for it, her yearning heart, which mourned for the sufferings of her son, even though these were being left behind, infinitely soothed and comforted when he sat thus with her and spoke of tender, intimate, loving things.

Often they spoke of Diana, who was growing to be a daughter in that house. Leon asked counsel of his mother what he might speak to her of that love which was springing up between them, making of each life a more vital, noble, beautiful thing.

For he must go back, they all knew that, if the awful struggle continued still, as indeed it seemed like to do for perhaps yet another year—two years even—before the power of the ruthless foe should be broken. In three months, Dr. Rodin had told him, he might reckon on an arm of a soundness sufficient for him to work upon the staff, where a place was to be found for him. He had made his mark, this Leon de Québriac. His country would have need of his clear brain, courageous soul and virile body again. And he would go. No thought of aught else was in his heart. So of his mother he asked her wise counsel concerning the woman he loved. What would be best for her? To be assured of that bond which had grown so strong and vital between them? Or for him to go forth again with the word unspoken, though of necessity understood (for eyes and hearts have mystical language of their own), to await that hoped-for day of a blessed reunion, when war might be a thing of a shadowed and dreadful past, whilst the joy and ecstasy of blessed peace might again enfold a quivering world?

The Marquise pondered this point in her own wise heart; and Leon talked with her from the depths of his own, and to feel her son so filled with generous, chivalrous and self-effacing thoughts, and so fully her own through each fibre of his being, brought an immense joy and

peace into the heart which loved and had agonised for him so often.

It was not hard to be patient, Leon told her, for Diana understood : of that he felt assured. They lived from day to day in a species of enchantment infinitely sweet. That *Pays du Tendre*, of which he had told her, lay about their steps. It was around them with its lovely glamour wherever they moved. And they knew its exquisite, wandering ways, which led to an ultimate goal of glory.

"Speak, my son," the Marquise told him, upon one radiant evening after Diana had gone home, and Leon had come to her with dreams in his eyes, "Speak—and may the good God bless to you and her—yea and to me also—those words which you twain shall exchange."

The light had leaped into Leon's eyes, and with his hand upon his mother's shoulder and his glance searching hers, he said in a very low voice :

"Maman, dost thou know how happy it makes me to hear those words from thy dear lips—*le Bon Dieu !* Is it that after all these years thou also hast found that the heart of man cannot rest, save in the light of that Love which is God ? "

She made him no direct answer, though her hand sought his that rested upon her shoulder, and pressed it quivering—closely. He bent to kiss her brow and whispered :

"When I go back—into the red war-cloud, I shall think that it is not only my betrothed—Diana—nor our sweet and gentle Lenore, who will bring my name ever before the throne of the divine Father in Heaven, but also the loving, faithful heart of the mother who bore me. What joy for me that will be ! "

Again, though in silence, she pressed his hand. He knelt at her feet, looking up into her face, and in that soft silence the music of Lucien floated out to them, whilst the voice of Lenore seemed to rise and rise, as though it pierced the very floor of Heaven and mingled with the angel songs which never cease.

And so it came about that the *fiançailles* of Leon and Diana were made. It was not a time for festivities. All was very quietly accomplished. But the girl went about with a transfigured face, and upon Leon's was stamped a look of such utter content as could not but rejoice the heart of his mother to see.

They all rejoiced with him. He had grown so dear to all. Lenore felt as though she had found in him a brother. For he could talk with her as Lucien could not do. He could tell her of those things she so longed to hear—although they often tore her heart. He had once or twice heard her husband's name spoken, when French and British troops had been in close contiguity, and always with admiration. Leon knew that Marcus had performed many acts of splendid devotion and courage. Details he did not know; but the fact was clear. He had received a decoration from French as well as from English sources. Where all were brave, his gallantry had often been conspicuous; and Lenore hung upon his words with eyes ashine with feeling.

She was happy with the De Québriacs in their silent, beautiful house, and they begged of her to remain their guest awhile longer. Her house on the hill was being subjected to closest scrutiny and to sundry structural defences, which it was hoped would make it safe in the future from mysterious invasion, and possibly lead (though this had not yet happened) to the discovery of the hidden secrets which none now doubted existed in its immediate vicinity. Lenore was content that all should be done which was regarded as necessary or advisable. And meantime she remained with her friends, abundantly content; whilst her presence amongst them grew to become a source of quiet happiness which words could scarcely define.

Leon, perhaps, expressed it best when to his mother he said it was almost as though they had an angel in the house with them. And she assented, understanding well.

Then he dared to speak to her very soft and low, of what he divined about his brother. To none other could he have whispered such words ; for Lenore was the wife of a noble English soldier, her heart was faithful to her plighted word ; and Lucien never forgot this for a moment, though she brought so much of enchantment into his life.

Yet none could quite set aside the possibility which haunted all those whose dear ones were in the midst of perils unspeakable. Nor could widowhood, were it to be her portion, mean to Lenore quite what it would to other wives of youth. Surely if it were to happen that this loss was hers, there might be consolation for her not so very far away !

Mother and son could whisper of this one to the other. But Lucien himself never suffered his thoughts to dwell upon that possibility. That would have felt like a stain upon the beautiful friendship which was throwing its enchantment athwart his life. Any stain that tainted its purity and loveliness would rob it of its almost angelic quality. And no one was more acutely conscious of this than the Marquise herself. For to her there was something in Lenore's presence in their house which came charged with a sense of holiness and benediction.

Although not holding the Roman form of the Catholic faith, she was yet in such close touch with the spiritual mysteries and heavenly truths which belong to all Christian rites, that to worship with those who held it in its entirety was to her a simple, sweet and perfectly natural course. Often in the early morning she would slip away through the garden alleys, to the little church not far from the gates, where her morning orisons were offered. Leon, whose soldier's life tended to short nights and early awakenings, had from the first begun to join her. And now Lucien was often to be seen upon her other side, the Marquise watching them from an upper window with a strange yearning in her eyes.

This yearning would deepen as the days passed by, as

Leon's arm, beneath Dr. Rodin's skilled care and electric baths, grew ever stronger and more helpful. He often for an hour at a time discarded his sling. At table he began to use his fork as others did. Plain was it to all that before so very long his time for service would have come. The way of return might not open at once. The sea was very empty of craft now. Yet come it would, and then . . .

That question could receive no answer. The future was hidden from all eyes. But the mother-heart yearned over her boy who must go back into the red peril of war ; and when he was gone, how could she help him ?

And yet she was beginning to know—to understand—to yearn as never before for a return to that faith in which she had been reared—that faith which war's horrors and sufferings had served to awaken in the hearts of those sons who had never learned it from her lips. Had she wronged them in this ? And now . . . what could she do ?

Yet there came a pearly morning, when she herself stepped forth to join the little party on the terrace. Leon came towards her, his soul in his eyes, and placing her trembling hand upon his arm, walked proudly beside her.

"Maman—p'tite Maman !" he whispered, "what joy—what joy !"

CHAPTER XIX

INTERLUDES

MARCUS HERISTAL sat alone in a quiet room allotted to him in rest billets.

He looked worn and exhausted, as indeed he was. He had needed this rest for long ; but had been unable to take it. He had been in many of the hottest corners of

the line. His handling of men had been noticeable from the first. Many a dashing piece of special gallantry had been carried out under his auspices. He had brought off small *coups* through his foresight and initiative. His advance had been rapid, and many eyes were now upon him.

Perhaps he knew these things ; but he never showed that he did. He went on his way very quietly, a reserved, silent, dependable man. As a Captain he had brought his company to a high condition of training and perfection. Now as Lieutenant-Colonel his regiment was his strenuous care. No detail which came beneath his notice was too small to arrest his attention. His subordinates looked up to him with respect and admiration, his superiors had long been disposed to consult him. His previous life had given him wider experience than belong to most army-trained men, whilst his power of initiative and rapid judgment in moments of crisis—judgment almost invariably proved by result to have been sound—gave weight to his counsels, and caused the men under him to spring forward at any word of command he might issue, as though convinced that in this was the road to victory.

He had been deeply interested in his work, keyed up even to a certain grim joy in it. Yet the strain had told, and at this moment the relaxation of this interlude of rest was very welcome. To be beyond the roar of gunfire. To see sun-drenched fields and waving woods around him. To listen to the songs of birds, and watch peasant women at work in the fields, with laughing children tumbling about the hot earth—all this was infinitely restful. And moreover, a large mail had been recently distributed, and with eager eyes he was perusing the closely written sheets of three letters from his wife.

He loved her letters, so simply expressed, but to him full of poetry and music.

Having hastily mastered the contents of them all, he lay back in his deep chair, and conned over various

paragraphs as his eyes caught them, smiling very contentedly the while. Scarcely ever was there anything to censor in Lenore's letters. She very well knew the limits in which she might write. But those limits never appeared to thwart or discomfit her mood, or stultify her confidences.

"Life here is very sweet to me, Marcus, waiting for you. Every day is full of little sweet intimate things. There are the Sisters to think for, who never think for themselves. And the Reverend Mother thinks for me. It is all very restful and beautiful. There is the little chapel that you restored for them, Marcus. It makes me very happy as I kneel there to remember that. And I know that Father Augustin remembers it also when he ministers before the altar. Believe me, you are thought of daily there. And more and more I feel that over this place a benediction rests."

"I have been wandering in my beautiful gardens, Marcus—and thinking of you so far away. The scents of the garden are very precious to me. They bring back so many memories. Hot sweet scents, some of them from the herb garden. They carry me back to the days when we walked together over heathery moors and through garden alleys, and talked of many things. It seems to bring us nearer together. And sometimes I sit down and close my eyes, and the dream comes to me that you are near—sitting so close to me that I could touch you if I put out my hand. And that makes me ponder upon many beautiful thoughts. For are we not always very close together in some beautiful sense that I am coming to understand better as time goes on? Do you think often in your arduous life of those words I daily speak?—I believe in the Communion of Saints. Marcus, I do believe. The belief is grafted deep and deep in my heart. I think it means more to me every day. It means so much that I think it will take eternity to teach us all the lesson. But surely we can feel something of it here! In the little chapel, in my garden that

you have made beautiful for me, and where I believe we shall one day wander together, I think of all these beautiful things ! ”

“ The dear Marquise comes often to see me. I love her deeply. I think she knows it and is glad, though I can never speak openly of my love. Her face is beautiful, yet often very sad. I know that she has had troubles in the past ; and now her son is at the war. She cannot often hear of him. It is hard to get news, now that so few ships call. And she is sad also because she does not walk in the light as others of us see it. Ah, if only she could understand ! But indeed I believe that one day her eyes will be opened. What joy when that day comes—joy even with the angels of God ! How wonderful ! ”

“ I have been down at the House of Dreams, as Lucien likes to call it, and indeed I often feel how good a name that is for it ! Lucien is such a wonderful musician ! I have told you that before, have I not ? And he is composing a Mass. It is most wonderful and beautiful. He likes to try the numbers over with me. I sing the words to the sound of the wonderful harmonies that weave themselves beneath his hands. It is very glorious. I think that in other days and other surroundings, Lucien would have been a great musician, of whom all the world might be talking. But that he would never seek to be. His music is almost sacred to him. You feel that when you watch his beautiful face as he plays. It carries him up and up, and you feel as though the gates of Heaven were thrown open to admit the glorious sounds of praise and prayer and thanksgiving ! I have never known anyone quite like Lucien before. Perhaps to you what I say sounds strange to be written of a man. Yet when you come to know him, you will understand. I think that you and he will be friends. He has a beautiful soul ; and you are Marcus Heristal—my husband.”

The last paragraph had evidently been hastily penned.

“ Leon has come back. A vessel is going. Our shipwrecked guests leave by it. It is beautiful to watch the

happiness of my dear friends, the Marquise and her sons. We are all very happy. But I cannot write more. God bless and keep you always, Marcus, and bring us together in His good time."

Marcus smiled a gentle, tender smile, as he folded the flimsy sheets, and then carried them to his lips before putting them away in the pocket-book he never allowed out of his possession. He looked out of the window, and saw a little copse beside which purred a tiny stream. He thought it would be good to go out and lie in the shade, to hear the murmur of the breeze overhead, whilst the sounds which reached him would be sounds of peace and not of strife and terror.

Very soon he was lying in a little hollow, his tired head pillowed upon moss; and with the music of Lenore's words ringing softly through his tired brain, he fell asleep.

What woke him he did not know. Perhaps the sound of his own name. For when he became fully conscious of his surroundings again, he knew himself to be the subject of a dialogue passing somewhere just out of sight, behind the big beech-tree at whose foot he had stretched himself, whilst his khaki-clad figure showed up little against the burnt summer ground.

It did not, however, strike him at once that he had not been seen, that he was an involuntary eavesdropper; and when that consciousness came upon him, he felt unable to move or show himself. He was held motionless as in the clutch of a spell.

"Yes, a fellow told me who had been with the chaps they sent over from the island. Been torpedoed, they had, by one of those devil's toys of the water-Hun. And then they got to this island in one of the boats, and there was a place all ready for them. Lady Heristal had thought of it, 'twas said—the wife of the chap here; and all of them ready to kiss the hem of her garment or worship her shadow as it passed."

"Never knew Heristal was married," said another voice.

"Well, he is; but I fancy it's been a rather odd sort of marriage too."

"How so? Heristal isn't the kind to do odd things. A very sane man."

"Oh, that's all right. I fancy by what these fellows had picked up that it was a war-marriage, so that he might be able to send her away into safety in some place he had bought before, it seems. Rather fancy they married and parted, and he went to the war straight off."

"Well, I think I did hear from somebody, now you mention it, that he had a ward he was going to marry after the war. But you think they married first?"

"Oh, they're married all right. Yes, that would fit in. He married her to give her the status which made things better for her whilst he was away. For all I know it may have been a love match all right, only by what those fellows said she must be a lot younger than he. And I fancy if he was to go west out here, she would not be long finding another mate. Those French chaps evidently wanted to give her one! Sort of romance a poilu rather likes to watch and foster."

"Romance? Not much romance about wantin' to make over one good chap's wife to 'some 'other fellow—what!"

"Ah, I've put it a bit too baldly, I think. As I heard it, there was a lot of romance floating around. A French Marquis, a bit lamed from an accident in boyhood, a brother fighting here in France, a stately mother they all adored. And he a musician—they couldn't talk enough about that! Came up to their place, in Lady Heristal's house, and played to them by the hour. Then she would sing to his accompaniment! That put the lid on! Said it was the voice of an angel or the music of the spheres—or words to that effect. And it was the way he would look at her as she sang. Oh, nothing of the earth earthy about it. Not that sort, that young Marquis. In the novels they make 'em bad—corrupt ;

but that's all rot in this case. If any sort of idyll was weaving itself, it was as impalpable as a dream to them both. The fellow made great point of that. He adored the lady, and would as soon have tried to smirch the honour of his mother or his sister. But of course thought is free . . ."

"And the chances of war have to be faced. Heristal never saves himself—not as much, perhaps, as his rank now entitles him to do. You mean that the French boys played with the notion that if the English husband did not return there would be one ready and willing, in due time, to fill his place?"

"That's it. Ready and able to make her happy once more. No harm in that, is there? Those hasty war-marriages have not always been a success. However, Heristal is a fine chap; and any woman should be proud to be his wife. I'm for hoping he'll get through all right. But it's queer these days how the war widows so often marry again in such quick time."

"Isn't it? Don't like it much myself. Seems like being forgotten too fast, once you've given up everything—even your life. Well, can't be helped. I'm not married, and I'm often glad I'm not. Awful hard lines for the chaps with wife and kids. Just as well to be a free-lance, with nobody to care so mighty much. That looks a jolly little brook to dip one's feet in. Mine are a bit hot and swollen still. Shall we wander along and find a pleasant pool?"

The men moved away, all unconscious of the near presence of the man of whose wife they had been speaking. Heristal lay very still in his nest of fallen leaves and moss. Presently he took out Lenore's letters once more—with others that he had received earlier in the campaign, and studied them with deep and earnest care.

There were many mentions of Lucien. These scattered about in different letters, written at intervals, had not made much impression upon him. Now, as he hunted for them and perused them in close succession, his face

grew very grave. A tender light was in his eyes ; yet they were sad eyes too.

When Heristal again folded away all the letters, his face showed pale and intensely grave.

“ Did I do her a wrong—my gentle, loving little Lenore ? ” his spirit questioned. “ Did I ask too much of her ignorance and innocence ? Or, rather, did I accept too readily what she in her young purity and guilelessness offered me ? Yet how could we guess what was coming ? A war-wedding ! No, it was not that. Had I foreseen this cloud-burst, who could say what I would have ruled and done ? And now I have left her for two years. It has been impossible to visit her in that place so difficult and uncertain of access. My duty has held me here. And the months and years are passing, and her lovely youth is blossoming into the perfection of womanhood ! How I picture it ! And another has seen her beauty ! And there are ties which draw them together. Is it possible that with him she would be happier than she can ever be with me ? Who can say ? Yet how likely ! And if when I return to her I feel that it might have been better for her . . . ”

He rose suddenly and paced with bent head beneath the over-arching trees. A great tumult was raging within him. He knew that Lenore was faithful, knew that no such thought as was tormenting him had ever seriously presented itself to her sweet purity. Yet the fire still burned within him. Had he done her some unconscious wrong ? Would it have been better for her had he refused the boon she had so sweetly pressed upon him in the innocence of her untried maidenhood ?

Questions teemed ; but answers were impossible. Heristal turned at length upon his heel and betook himself to the quarters where some of his superior officers were billeted. One of these had been speaking with him gravely only the previous evening ; and to him Heristal's parting words had been :

“ I will think of it, and let you know.” Well, he sud-

denly felt his thinking done, and his reply was ready.

* * * *

A week later Marcus was in a London hotel, penning a letter to Lenore.

"My dearest love: I cannot tell you details. That you will understand. But I am about to leave for a different theatre of war. It seems that my knowledge of a few eastern languages, including Arabic, and my familiarity with some of the countries and the ways of their inhabitants, will make me of use upon the staff. I was asked to volunteer for special service, and I have done so. I leave to-night for a destination I myself do not yet know.

"Whether I shall face more or fewer dangers where I am going it is impossible to say. But what is certain is that it will be very difficult to communicate with you, even, as it will probably cut me off from any letters of yours.

"This will be hard for us both; but we have faced the like before. We have made our sacrifice, and we will not draw back.

"One word, my Lenore, to you before your husband is swallowed up by the shadows. If I should not return to you, my darling, do not let this shadow your life too long. Believe me, that would be my greatest sorrow, if I thought it would so happen.

"We have known each other long, and our love is tender and true. But you are very young, with your beautiful life stretching still before you. I shall like to think you will miss me, will mourn for me, if I be taken from you. But it would deeply grieve me if I thought that my death in my country's service would cast a lasting blight upon your life.

"Lenore, that must not be. I, your husband, say it. There may well arrive a day when another may come to you, who will ask to teach you that lesson in love which I had hoped to make my task.

"Lenore, should such a day as that come, should your heart incline you to that other, be sure that no

thought of me is suffered to stand between you and this new possibility and promise of happiness.

"For me, your love has been very precious. I carry it enshrined in my heart. But should I be called across that border land, into the great eternity beyond, where is no marrying or giving in marriage, then believe me, should your heart incline that way, I, Marcus Heristal, would be the first to tell you to follow its natural dictates.

"That I must needs say; and you will not forget. It may be that we shall meet again in joy, with the shadow of war removed from the world. For that we may hope—and pray. But if the ruling for me is otherwise, when my last thoughts turn to you, my sweet wife, I shall wish for you a happiness you were not suffered to enjoy with me, and I shall pray that you find it. Yours till death, MARCUS HERISTAL."

CHAPTER XX

SUMMER-TIDE

IT was so beautiful a summer there at St. Cecilia's Island that the people spoke of it with wonder. It seemed, as they said, as though the good God had made here a little oasis of peace, where the thunder of the war could not penetrate, and where it was almost possible to forget the strange and terrible tragedies which the world was watching.

Almost, perhaps, yet never altogether. None of them would so have wished. Still, as the good Father Augustin told them, they need not fear to rejoice in the beautiful gifts which came to them from the hand of the good God. A grateful spirit that rejoices with thanksgiving is acceptable in His sight. And never need they forget in word or deed those brave and dear ones far away, standing for the right against the whelming powers of evil. For

them they could work, for them they could pray; and looking round them, and up towards that pile of building on the hill, where, as so many felt, a great struggle betwixt evil and good had been waged in the past, and might even yet be waging, they might realize, as others perhaps might find it difficult to do, how the good God watched over this earth of His, and never forgot its needs, never forsook His children who called upon His holy Name in faith and confidence.

Lenore loved the visits of the aged priest. She had in time returned to her own home, which had been declared safe from those hidden forces which had worked so mysteriously there. What had been done she did not fully understand. And on her return she found a double guard about the place. Yet nothing definite had been discovered—no secret way of access had been disclosed. Only by a system of ingenious electric alarms it was now deemed impossible for any approach to be made unsignalled. And men, with grim faces that smiled a little strangely, opined that now the first of such attempts would be the last. Lenore was warned not to fear if an explosive blast should reach her ears. It would probably be only the prelude to some valuable discovery.

She smiled. Lenore never had feared the perils of this place, and feared them no whit now. Father Augustin had taken up his abode in the precincts. There were many glad to accept his ministrations. The daily Mass was attended by soldiers and servants, as well as by Lenore and the Reverend Mother and Sisters. Peasants from the hills were beginning to steal to the place, once regarded with superstitious fears. The *Maison Monastère* was becoming a centre for holy thoughts and acts. Lenore felt it very good to be there.

The Marquise would fain have kept her down in her beautiful house below, where she had spent three happy weeks. But Lenore presently felt the need of being alone in that place which was her own, and where she was waiting for her husband.

It had been very sweet to be cared for and loved as she was by all in that House of Dreams. But presently she wanted to get away. She could not quite have told them why, nor did she try. But there was something almost too sweet and compelling about Lucien and his music. It would almost steal her senses as she listened. It awakened such strange longings and desires. It seemed to carry her away into a different world, where wonderful secrets lay enshrined. Her feet trod, as it were, exquisite, flower-paved paths. But she knew not whither they were leading her. Only it was as though some distant, shining goal lay before her, and yet her feet seemed to falter as she sought to press towards it.

Then she was wont to meet the gaze of Lucien's gentle, worshipping eyes, and that glance had power to thrill and move her. Nevertheless there was always pain in the thrill, and something would catch at her heart-strings and wrench them in a fashion quite inexplicable to her. And so she was more at peace in her own house on the hill, with the silent gardens about her, with the beautiful round of simple devotion weaving itself into the fibre of her days; yet with constant visits from the friends she loved so well, who seldom suffered more than a day to pass without appearing, one or the other of them, to ask of her welfare and sit awhile with her in pleasant talk.

Leon was still at home. The arm, though making satisfactory progress, had not mended with as much rapidity as at the first Dr. Rodin had anticipated; and from time to time the healing process had been retarded by slight attacks of trench fever, which had thrown the patient back.

The Marquise would sometimes say to her son: "I fear I am scarcely such a patriot mother as I fain would be. I would not hold thee back, my son; that thou knowest. Yet it is so good to have thee here in safety that I cannot grieve."

Knowing so well all that was thus implied, he would look back at her and answer, sometimes in one phrase,

sometimes in another, but always like this: "Ah! it is a summer to be remembered always and always—the sweetest summer of my life. Let us be happy in it to the end, p'tite Maman."

Leon came frequently to the hill. Diana would often be there also. And Lenore watched them with a tender inquiry in her gaze. It was so sweet, she thought, to observe them. Never had she quite understood before what a lovely thing the pure unsullied devotion of man and maid could be. She saw the happiness that shone from Diana's eyes, heard it in every tone of her musical, bird-like voice. Whilst in those of Leon she would see a shining that was all steadfastness and worshipful adoration of the woman he loved, and yet whom he might possibly never call his wife.

Diana would have wedded him with joy and gladness, but that was against his code of honour. He judged that unless he came safely back to her, it would be best for her that she should be free. Dr. Rodin was of the same opinion. Lenore herself was not sure that they might not have judged well. She was wearying for a husband who might never return. She knew the hours of heartsick waiting and watching which had been hers in the past, and would be hers for unknown days and weeks and months to come. Need Diana face this too?

She came to love Leon in these days. He spoke to her with a manly frankness that refreshed her. He loved the dim little chapel. Often he would ask her to accompany him there. And afterwards, sitting in the cool cloister with her, he would tell her details of his soldier-life, of which he very seldom spoke, and speak of things which often brought tears to her eyes, they were so simple, so full of poignant pathos.

Once as they sat thus, and he told her strange stories of crosses standing unscarred amidst masses of ruins, and little shrines which had escaped as by a miracle the devastation of high explosive and Hun ferocity, he told in low tones of things which men had seen amid

the reek of battle and which they never would forget.

"And now I can have the happiness of thinking of my mother—my brother—in a place like that"—he indicated by a gesture the little chapel—"kneeling before the shrine, with prayers for me upon their lips. That is what I missed so much in the past. I did not know if Maman ever prayed for her soldier-boy so far away in peril. Now I shall know that she does this. Lenore, she has told me how it began—here, in the place, with you to help her. Always I shall love you for that. That when I was far away and in peril, you thought of me—you prayed for me!"

"But, of course, Leon! How could it be otherwise? How could we ever forget those who offer their all to save us? And your mother, your brother—so dear to me!"

He looked at her with a strange seriousness in his gaze. Words seemed to be near to his lips, and yet they did not pass the portals of speech. She looked at him.

"Did you want to say anything, Leon? Do not be afraid. Sometimes I feel as though in you I had a brother—a brother whom I may trust."

He took her hand and lifted it to his lips.

"I do not know if I can find words in which to frame a haunting thought," he answered, "and yet let me say this much. I know my brother's heart. I think I know it as he perhaps does not himself. It holds beautiful secrets, but no thought of shame or wrong. Lenore, we all pray—Lucien also—for the safe coming of your noble husband, who has given himself in the cause of France, which is the cause of the world. We pray for his restoration to you; and yet we know—you amongst others—that these our prayers may not meet the direct fulfilment of our wishes——" He paused for some moments, Lenore sitting with bent head and eyes veiled by their fringe of long lashes; then very softly he continued: "But if in the rulings of the good God, in whose love we trust, this may not be, then Lenore I would ask of you that you

will not let your life be desolated. I can speak as a man who loves ; yet who in like case would not desire such desolation for the one nearest his heart upon earth. We hear so much of the good God's power for comfort—is not one of His blessed Names that of the Comforter ? And so we must wish for the comfort of those we love if trial comes of their faith." Again he lifted her hand to his lips, and with a soft glance which lived with her long he concluded his speech with these words : " And so, perhaps, in days to come it may be that I shall know the love of a gentle sister. Always have I longed for my brother to wear the crown of a man's greatest joy."

Lenore sat very still when he had left her, and the next day brought her that letter from her husband which he had penned, after he had volunteered for a mission which he knew to be fraught with exceptional peril.

Long she sat perusing it. Then she went with it into the little chapel, and on her knees she read it yet again and again. The Reverend Mother from her stall watched her with eyes of love and sympathy. Then bent her head and prayed that whatever the perplexity might be, now or hereafter, light and guidance might follow for one whose trust was surely placed where true and loving counsel is to be found.

She wondered whether Lenore would come to her for advice ; but the days went by without bringing her—quiet, golden, summer days of dreamy loveliness, which she spent alone in her gardens, or else within her private room, writing at her table, sometimes with tears in her eyes. For who could tell when or whether the words she wrote would ever meet the eyes for whom they were penned ?

The little vessel which brought that letter would assuredly have taken Leon back had he been permitted to return. As it was, Diana saw the ship depart with a strange throb of rapture. Now it might be many weeks before another chance served him. More golden weeks

of happiness lay before them. Weeks which nothing could ever take from her. In these days the world had learned not to look far ahead.

Came a golden, radiant morning of early autumn, when upon the sea lay wreaths of floating opaline mist, which softly lifted as the sun gained power.

“Crash! Bang! Crash!”

Those who were yet sleeping sprang up in amaze and affright. Those who were astir rushed to their windows to seek explanation.

Dr. Rodin, always up with the sun, and with instruments close at hand, was the first to descry, low upon the water, just as the mist wreath lifted, that small sinister-looking craft, from which, even as he focused it with his powerful telescope, a brilliant flash shot forth.

A few seconds later and the rocks resounded again to the crash and the bang, such as had just awakened and alarmed the town, and the doctor shouted to his daughter :

“A submarine, Diana—shelling the town! With the Maison Monastère, as I take it, for its chiefest objective!”

Lenore had been in the chapel when the first crash came. The priest at the altar was saying his Mass. A few soldiers were present and some servants. Only for a moment was there any pause. The old man took up the office where for a moment he had stopped. The soldiers were gone in a moment. Lenore and the nuns knelt on.

It was little they could hear, for the air about them was one great resounding tumult of sound. And from time to time the very ground beneath their feet seemed to rock and tremble. It was as though they had suddenly been transported from the peace and safety and golden loveliness of their remote island, into the very heart of that blasting, devastating warfare which had heretofore only been a name to them.

Nurse Frome entered the chapel hastily, and laid a hand upon Lenore's arm.

"The soldiers have sent word. We are to go into the cellar they have dug for us. We are under orders now. We must obey."

The Mass was just concluding. The old priest turned to give the benediction. Then Lenore suffered herself to be guided from the place, the Sisters following as soon as word had been passed to them. And as they issued forth they felt the tremor of the earth as the guns upon the rocks behind hurled back their response to that challenge from the sea. But all were calm and full of courage. They knew that death might be very near them; but so it was with half the world besides, who shrank not nor felt fear.

They had been warned of this possibility, and the dug-out had been prepared as a place of refuge, should ever need be. Quietly they found it—a dark windowless underground place, large enough to hold as many as were likely to need its shelter.

Lenore would fain have watched the strange duel from above; would better still have waited, had the choice been hers, within the precincts of the little chapel. She felt sure that Father Augustin had gone back there, and she looked towards the Reverend Mother, who, understanding the appeal in her eyes, knelt down upon the pavement, and, with a Sister on either side and Lenore and others in a circle round her, offered up a litany of penitence and prayer.

Suddenly all sounds of warfare ceased—as suddenly as they had begun. It had been but one short half-hour that the bombardment had lasted; but to many whole days had often seemed shorter.

An officer appeared in the doorway, smoke-grimed and grim of aspect.

"All is safe," he reported—"we have sent the submarine to the bottom. It was a pretty three-sided affair. Her guns, ours and those at Dr. Rodin's place. She had the help of the floating mist wreaths on the water. She could wait till they lifted and get in her shot quick

as lightning. Sometimes she was shrouded again before we had sighted the gun. She moved the whole time. Hers was a fixed target—ours a moving one. But we got her? *Sacré* for a moment we thought her gone—dived—as our fire was getting too hot. But either she was damaged and failed, or she was not quick enough. Pouf—pouf!—two shots were sent at the same second from our guns and those at Rodin's. Whether one or both struck her who knows? She got it fair amidships, and there was just a spurt of gas or steam. Then down she went—not in the fashion she had tried after—for her debris flew high in the air. Her conning tower toppled over. That submarine will rise no more!"

They emerged into the open air, which seemed penetrated by strange fumes.

"Has anyone been hurt?" asked Lenore.

"Not here," was the response—"in the town, who can say? They sent shells there also. Whoever was in charge of that devil's craft, knew what he was about—knew the place well. They tried for the cable station, the power house, the telephone station. But it was the *Maison Monastère* upon which they concentrated their explosives! *Nom d'un chien!*—but they had their answer back! Those devils have gone where they will find their own like! An unprotected town—that is what the Hun loves! Pray Heaven they meet their deserts at last!"

Lenore gazed about her with wide, wondering eyes. Signs of mischief were apparent, though fewer than she had expected, for the whole place had seemed to rock beneath them at times. Some large fragments of masonry were lying in the great courtyard, and there was a rent in the outer wall of the north wing. One or two trees had been cut clean in two, and lay toppled over across the garden paths, whilst one shell had passed through the great doors into the hall where the soldiers had lived, so that one group of statuary had been wrecked and lay in fragments on the pavement.

As Lenore stood gazing, Father Augustin entered, pale yet calm.

"The chapel, Father?" she asked anxiously.

"Not touched, my child," he answered; "we were marvellously protected. I go to give thanks."

"I also," she answered softly. Yet she did not go at that moment; for as she passed out, she saw Lucien and Leon who arrived in great haste, and who advanced with outstretched hands to meet and greet her.

"You are safe—you are safe! Thank Heaven for that. But Lenore, we need you and your people also; for we think we have now in our hands the clue to the mystery of the Maison Monastère!"

CHAPTER XXI

UNMASKED

THE clue to the mystery! What did that mean? Excitement was in every face. Converging upon the courtyard of the Maison Monastère was a squad of men from the town, and the guard from the gun-emplacement above, headed by Captain Duroc, whose grim face wore a look of quiet exultation. His had been the hand which sent one shot into the submarine. Now he was ready for whatever might be the next task, and he looked at Leon with questioning eyes.

"Let us smoke the vipers out of their holes once and for all! What is it that you have come to tell us, Captain de Québriac?"

"Get together an armed guard, and I will show you," answered Leon.

Lucien placed himself at Leonore's side. Nurse Frome, as full of courage as of excitement, was well to the fore; and the great hound, sound and strong again, pressed up beside her as though mutely proffering her his support.

Ever since the bombardment ceased he had been bounding hither and thither as though on the track of some hidden foe, and his wild bays had rung echoing from rock to rock.

"Let the soldiers go first. Leon will lead them," Lucien told her, in response to her eager questioning glances; "but we will follow at a discreet distance."

"Will you tell me what it is you think you have discovered?" spoke Lenore, as they stood quietly aside, whilst the guard from the town and the men in charge of the guns conferred together, and discussed their plans of action.

Dr. Rodin came galloping up on one of his white mules, whilst Diana on the other was only a few minutes behind. Lenore made her a sign to come to her side, which she instantly obeyed. Her eyes were shining, her cheek was flushed.

"Lenore, Lenore—is anything hurt here? It seemed as though they were trying to batter down your house and rock, and send it hurtling into the sea!"

"They did make it their target," Lucien answered, whose face told that he had been through a time of poignant anxiety. "It is marvellous how little harm has been done. For as a rule those men know how to handle their guns."

Lenore looked from one to the other with light in her eyes.

"I think my house was protected," she said very simply; "Father Augustin was offering Mass at the time it began. When he had finished his office, he remained in the church and was there all the time."

Diana looked at her with a faint expression of awe upon her face.

"And you think—do you think—that it was partly that which saved you?"

"I think, for I have so often felt it, that there is something hallowed about this place. I do not mean that wickedness has not been done here. But evil is from

below. Blessing is from above. And this is the stronger power. Always I have believed that."

"You have," spoke Lucien, "and you are right. Guardian angels have been near this spot to-day, and have averted what seemed inevitable destruction."

"Did it look like that to others? It was rather terrible for a time. It seemed as though the house was being undermined. Its foundations seemed to shake. And there were strange rumblings from below. Almost it seemed at one time as though explosions were taking place under us. But probably that was just the effect of bombardment. We have not grown used to it, as they have in so many places. . . ."

She paused, for Lucien was gazing at her with an immense interest in his eyes.

"You seemed to hear explosions beneath your feet?" he asked.

"To me it so sounded; but I may be wrong. I should have said it was like the rattle of machine-guns, only that would be impossible. And I have never heard the sound of them. I only go by what Leon has described—and what I have read."

The extreme interest in Lucien's eyes only deepened.

"What makes you look like that?" she asked.

"Perhaps you will see before long," he answered.

"Lenore, I verily believe that we are on the way to discover those hidden places beneath our feet here, whose existence has always been suspected, but the entrances to which have defied the authorities of law and order for centuries. That caves and subterranean passages exist has been a tradition of the island as old as its history. The marvel is how the secret has been preserved and handed down. Two families have always been supposed to hold the clue in their hands, passing it down from father to son. You will not know the names—Taquet and Gonchon. Wild, strange beings, keeping apart from their kind, without known fixed abode, sometimes seen in boats on the sea, at others in

the heart of the hills. Dying out families ; sometimes rumoured to be extinct. Then appearing again, never mixing with others."

" But would such persons disguise and come into my house ? For I think you believe that the monk who has been seen here must come from below."

" Yes, and those strange men, if any of them be left, would not now, I think, be able to play such a part, even were the desire there. Of old we believe that many illicit secrets were concealed in the heart of this hill. And those who carried on the work with the aid of these strange island men, had strong desire that the house should stand empty. But of late years I now believe that a quite different state of things has grown up. In our midst we have been (like other nations) cherishing a nest of vipers. German guile has achieved that which baffled our French astuteness. By guile or gold or both the Germans have won the secret of these caves ; and here they have been cunningly working to victual those devils of the deep, and possibly even to harbour them, though of this we cannot yet be assured. I trust we are on the way to find it out."

Then Lenore spoke the word which once she had spoken before, her eyes wide with wonder—" Submarines ! "

" Yes," he answered, " Leon has been on the watch and on the hunt these many weeks. More and more does he believe that there may be a way into the caves from the sea, only to be gained by diving. And the water round our island is very deep. It is within the bounds of possibility that the smaller type of submarine, cleverly handled, might dive and come up in some hidden cave beneath this hill, or elsewhere. In old days men probably used tiny craft which could be hidden in crevices of the rocks. And there are certainly outlets into some of our valleys here, as also (if it could be found) into this house—as has been practically proved."

" And you think," spoke Lenore breathlessly, " that to-day you are going to find out the secret ? "

"Leon believes that they have unmasked the secret themselves with their high-explosive charges? He was watching with his telescope. And all at once he gave a great shout. It was when the bombardment was at its height. He showed me the black chasm he had seen open out under the fire of those guns. That is where we are going now—to see if his idea be right. He said a portion of the hill-side seemed to be blown away. If so, they may have done themselves to death by their own infernal machinery. Shall we follow the exploring party? We must keep at a convenient distance. We must not hamper the soldiers by our presence. Yet I know that you would like to be there to see. And Diana does not feel like being left behind, I am sure!"

"Nor do I neither, Monsieur le Marquis," spoke Nurse Frome; "nor am I going to leave my lady to face them dirty Germans without me! And if there's any killing of such vipers going on, I don't mind taking a hand myself! That I don't!"

"Then we are kindred spirits, Nannie!" quoth Diana gaily, as she took the nurse's arm. Lucien led the way, and they watched the regular march of the soldiers under Leon's guidance, as they skirted the hill-side, and found themselves in a region of uncultivated broken ground which lay beneath the house and its gardens, and was too full of rocks and spiny cactus clumps and other wild growths to have tempted men to seek to bring it under cultivation.

Ahead they heard men's voices in consultation. The last of the party vanished round a spur of the hill-side. Lucien went a little ahead of Lenore, and presently beckoned her to follow. Odin suddenly leaped forward with a deep, baying note.

"Good!" they heard Leon's voice exclaim, "let the dog go first. If the air be too foul, he will come out and warn us."

Lenore and Diana, clinging together in their curiosity and excitement, saw that Leon's party had gathered

round a place where the whole hill-side seemed scarred and blasted. Huge rocks had been torn up, and many had plainly gone hurtling down the steep slope. Vegetation all around was scorched and blasted, and in the side of the hill yawned a black orifice near to which Dr. Rodin, Captain Duroc and Leon were standing.

Odin had sprung within, and now they could hear his booming bayings echoing along some passage-way, till they grew faint in the distance.

Soldiers were now busy lighting lanterns which they had brought. Lucien stepped up to his brother and spoke aside with him for a few moments. Then he returned to his party.

"We may follow, but at a discreet distance. Leon is right. This is the orifice to a tunnel in the hill-side. The bombardment has revealed it. Now we have but to follow on, and learn the secret hidden in the hill. A guard will be stationed at intervals as we proceed. If we do discover a nest of vipers, they will be quickly scotched or killed. It is not likely that we shall have trouble. The German knows when he is beaten. It is hands up and the whine of 'Kamarad' with them then. They have no taste for dying like rats in a trap."

Lucien had a lantern, and went in front. Points of light could be seen glimmering ahead. The tunnel seemed to run a straight line through the hill, somewhat on the down grade. Suddenly from the depths of the interior a frightful tumult arose. It was Diana who first understood.

"It is Odin. He has found something. He has his prey fast. Shall I run? He might obey my voice. He may be tearing his victim to pieces!"

Lucien took her hand, the soldiers closed in about them. There was a great rush of feet, and suddenly the explorers found themselves at the tunnel's end, and in an immense vaulted cavern that in places was pitchy dark, whilst high up amid black shadows gleams of light stole uncertainly in through what were evidently fissures in the

rocks—whether natural or artificially made could not be determined.

Deep within, lost in the blackness of the shadows, horrible sounds were to be heard, snarling, worrying sounds, mingled with chokings and strangled cries. And just as the exploring party reached the great cavern, which began to glow with the lights they carried, Odin appeared dragging with him some large, long object, and Lucien exclaimed :

“ Good heavens—he has got a man in his jaws ! ”

He had—a big, heavily made man—had him by the throat. Diana leaped forward, and by force of her words and pressure of her strong hands, caused the great beast to loose his hold. But he still stood over the man, who lay on his back apparently past all sense of his surroundings. And the Captain of the Town Guard, stepping up and holding a light near to his face, remarked :

“ Ah, now we have Hans Hempel—the escaped interned one ! *Parbleu* ! It is as we said. He and his like have been in hiding in our midst ! Well, I take it one of them was in that devil’s craft we have sent to the bottom to-day ! How many are there in hiding here still ? Six of you search the cave and find out. Dr. Rodin—is this man done for by the dog’s fangs ? ”

The doctor knelt down to make his examination. The search party scattered to their task. Slowly Lucien and Lenore with the Nurse drew near, the latter stepping forward to give skilled assistance to Dr. Rodin. The dog stood with lashing tail and sullen, growling malevolence, watching the prey which had been taken from his strangle-hold, as though he only waited permission to bury his fangs afresh in his foe.

A shout from farther within the cave told of some discovery, and two men appeared dragging by the arms a wild-looking creature, not German this time but French, who, as soon as he saw the prostrate man upon the floor of the cave, uttered a shrill scream like that of a wild beast at bay, and wrenching himself from his captors

with an incredible agility, he sprang at Hempel, and with his heavy seaman's boots dealt him two savage kicks, aimed one at his head, the other at his ribs, before anyone could interpose.

From his lips there issued a flood of furious invective and abuse, couched in the vernacular of the island, now almost obsolete save in the remote regions behind. He was so wildly excited, so full of blind animal fury, that it was long before they could learn from him that which they longed to know. But later on, when out of sight of his prostrate foe, and under the watchful, tactful care of Dr. Rodin, he began to answer questions with a certain lucidity, which increased with the sympathy he felt in the circle about him.

Bit by bit, with many lapses which had afterwards to be filled up, yet with a certain graphic eloquence of a very rude kind, the man—Raoul Taquet, long supposed to have perished at sea—told his strange tale.

He had been brought up with a knowledge of these caves beneath the Maison Monastère. For generations unknown the secret had been with his fathers and their kinsfolk the Gonchon family now extinct. Strange tales were told of what had been done here, even before the days of which he had heard. There was a place he showed them where a kind of altar stood and beneath it an inverted cross. It was said that black mass had been said here long, long ago by the wicked monks, who had crept in amongst the holy men seeking to corrupt them. They had been cast out, so the legend said, and had taken refuge in the caves beneath, and had made the stairway by which they could appear in their former haunts and perpetrate strange crimes there. Then when the monastery had been burnt and the house built, others had learned the secret of the caves and had done strange things there. Counterfeit coining, secreting of contraband, hiding of outlaws from the African or French coasts—who knew what besides? And even the fear that if the house had inmates their secrets might come

to light. So always steps were taken to scare away such as tried to live there.

Was there then a way up into the house? But yes. And he would show it to the messieurs. Oh, he would tell them all—show them all! And again a flood of invective flowed from his lips, he shook his fists wildly in the air, and almost foamed at the mouth.

Then came his own tale. It was German guile and gold that had first lured the secret from him. Then he had been kept a practical prisoner, even before the outbreak of the war; for Germans were working here below. It was becoming a storehouse, an arsenal almost. Yes, and there were men who came and went mysteriously. Oh, he knew now—from the submarines. And down here they kept the stores of what they needed. And the little ones could dive in and fetch them what they needed and keep them supplied. And men came and worked in the arsenal that he would show them. But they were afraid of discovery from above.

A wild strange tale of German guile and craft and cruelty! Treachery to those amongst whom they had dwelt as friends—deep planned schemes of vengeance to wreak upon the island which had sheltered them so long!

Yes, that submarine had been chiefly manned by the escaped interned prisoners, who had directed the fire, hoping to destroy the town and the Maison Monastère. But they had perished themselves, as they well merited; and of those left behind, all save himself and Odin's victim had met their death when the huge crashes flung aside the protecting wall and exploded the ammunition in the cave. They would find six corpses in that débris, if they looked long enough. And Taquet danced for joy as he pointed to the human fragments which were discernible amongst the rocky masses hurled this way and that.

He led them to the foot of a narrow spiral stair. He took them to its top. He showed a piece of extremely clever mechanism. A great iron plate fell before a light touch upon a spring. When it hung by its hinges, there

was revealed a great paving-stone. Another touch caused this to revolve, and suddenly light poured down. An oblong aperture was thus revealed, divided into two equal halves. Leon forced his way through one of these, and Dr. Rodin through the other. Leon found himself in the cloister on one side of the stout oaken door; the doctor on its other side in the hall of the statues. Later examination showed that when the pedestal of a group of marble had stood against the door, this pedestal had been hollowed out, and a door of exit carefully contrived. Monk or nun could find a way into house or cloister at will, and disappear in the shadows with equal ease; for the mechanism of the stone and the great iron plate was so simple and noiseless in its working that it had never been discovered even with closest scrutiny.

"Ah!" spoke Dr. Rodin, as they all stood at last in the great hall, with the door open between it and the cloister. "Things are clearing slowly. Down below the devil's workshop, and this stairway a funnel for sound. The dog heard—then the man. And it was guessed below. Hence the death of Jean Pitou! But I think that Odin has avenged him of his adversary! And the secret of the Maison Monastère is being revealed."

Lenore said:

"Give me into my care that poor man Taquet. Nurse Frome shall coax him back to human life again."

CHAPTER XXII

THE ENGLISH SAINT

THE mystery was solved indeed! It was a nine-day wonder for the island of St. Cecilia. The whole place flocked to inspect the great caverns which the bombardment had unmasked.

Suspicion had always been rife about their existence;

but lack of enterprise and superstitious fears had hindered that systematic and determined search which might have been crowned with success. And now, hoist by their own petard, the Germans who had succeeded where others failed, and had secreted stores including much ammunition within those shadowy hiding-places, lay mangled corpses within, done to death by the explosion of their own stores.

Taquet told the tale when, under Nurse Frome's care, he began to emerge from the condition of partial idiotcy which his harsh captivity and chronic terrors had induced. He described the bursting, through one of the fissures, of a shell which had fallen straight amongst the explosives stored in readiness for use by submarines, and what the result had been. He and Hempel alone had escaped—only later to be discovered by the huge dog, who had leaped upon Hempel, as upon a foe long sought, and had wellnigh done him to death. Indeed, he lay in a hopeless state, saved only from judicial death through the mortal wound inflicted by the hound's fangs.

It was decreed by the authorities, with the assent of Lady Heristal, that all openings to these caves should be effectually stopped up. Taquet knew them all—each of them so extraordinarily cleverly masked that discovery, often as they had been sought for, had been eluded. It was he who had—long since, and before war was even dreamed of here—been bribed and beguiled to betray the secret to the Germans. How bitterly he had since repented, his wrecked frame testified. He had been made a slave and a prisoner. And now, a battered, only half-sane human creature, he had been brought up into the light of day, and was learning not to shrink and cower before the approach of human beings.

It was with intense interest that the ramifications of age-old plots were partially unravelled. Careful search brought strange things to light which must have long been hidden. The legends of which old Taquet babbled received fullest confirmation.

Plainly in the far-back past black arts had been practised here. There had been monks who, breaking away from the Catholic rule and tradition, had dived into hidden and unholy mysteries, and instituted in the heart of the earth unclean and unholy rites. There was that altar consecrated to forbidden practices. There was that inverted cross upon which its devotees had been bidden to trample. The altar was taken away, broken into fragments and cast into the sea. The brazen cross let into the flags was reverently removed. It was carried into the little chapel, solemnly sprinkled with the aspersion water, blessed, and set into the cloister wall, near to the door by which the Sisters entered, who signed themselves reverently each time they passed it. The cleverly constructed stairway leading down into the caves was demolished and the aperture securely walled up; and the good Father Augustin performed sundry offices of exorcism in cloister and house, trusting that for the future every evil influence and shadowing power might be driven quite away.

Many persons, including the Marquise and her sons, attended these ceremonies, and of course Lenore and the nuns, whose faces betokened a deep joy and contentment in thus beholding the triumph of right over wrong, holy over impure influences, and the setting free (from all that worked malignantly) of their dearly loved home.

Later the Marquise spoke softly with Lenore.

"My child, there is much which is beautiful in all this—and wonderful is the faith of those who put their trust in these ceremonies. To me they are of an intense interest; yet I view them as an outsider. I speak not in irreverence—the good God forbid!—yet to me it savours somewhat of the play of pious children. If God, our Father, look down upon us and is always near to us, what need of all these ceremonies? Is not His Presence sufficient?"

Lenore pondered awhile in silence, then spoke a little

timidly, as she was wont to do upon such subjects to the stately Marquise.

"Dear Madame," she said, "I think that I enter into your meaning. Your soul is so strong, that these things which are aids to others seem something futile to you; yet to those who are trained to love such ordinances they are full of help and power. When God was dealing with men in early times He gave them many ceremonies to observe; and the Christian Church sees in these types of what she holds by symbol. In our English Church there is liberty for each soul to walk in the manner which most helps and best suits that spirit which God has given. Many ordinances are there; but each may choose how far these shall be used. That to me is beautiful. There is no compulsion, yet always there are helps for those who ask and wish them. I love the care that the Roman Church exercises over her children, and yet I feel that there is something higher still. Her worship is dear to me; but not all her rules and ways. . . ."

"There, my child, I am with thee. I could not bear the yoke imposed. I broke entirely away. All faith left me. Nor did I desire it otherwise until this war came. Then I began to long after that which once I had despised; and a measure of comfort is mine in going where others go, joining with them in part, winning my toilsome way back to the footstool of Omnipotent power. Yet there are bounds which I cannot pass; and I have no home in the House of God. I cannot conform to all that is desired of me; and thus I remain an outsider and alien still."

Lenore understood. It was in measure her own position here at St. Cecilia. But her faith and love and sweet devotional spirit seemed to pass by all these obstacles and feel them not. If she might not herself partake of certain holy rites she longed after, to be with those who so partook, joining with them in heart and spirit, her own uplifted into heavenly regions, seemed to suffice. In the oneness of the Body, in the Communion of Saints,

she found joy and peace and a satisfaction which stilled the hunger of her soul.

But then she did not belong to St. Cecilia as the Marquise did. Her position was far easier. She looked into the strong, sad face of her friend, and wondered how it would be with her in the future. God had called her, of that she had no doubt. Then surely He would direct her path.

The answer was nearer at hand than she could have supposed.

Within a month of the bombardment of the island, a vessel made its way into St. Cecilia's harbour; and all knew that it would take Leon away. He was fit for staff work now, and practically fit for active service, though the former strength had not been entirely restored to the injured arm. Still it was healed to all intents and purposes, and all knew that his duty now lay in another place.

The vessel brought some disabled French soldiers, ordered to a good climate; and with them came a white-headed English priest, under whose charge they were partially placed. He also had been bidden to seek recuperation in a softer clime for the ensuing winter months, and had very willingly taken a certain charge over these soldiers, to some of whom he had ministered through the campaign.

The little town was not now unprepared for such visitors. The Marquise and others had equipped a small, pleasantly situated villa on the *plage* as a place where any sick or wounded men could be received and tended. It lay in its little scented garden, with the lap of the sea coming up from the stretch of golden sands. Leon had been very interested in watching its equipment, and had had many suggestions to make. He had supplied some portion of the needful funds, and to Diana he had said:

"Make it your charge. Let me think of you here. If any wounded or suffering *poilus* come, take care of them—and think that you are caring for me. That

will be the truth, well understood. It will help us both."

And it helped Diana through his last days, whilst the vessel lay in port, and all knew that he must go.

It was from the men that they heard of that white-headed priest with the saintly face who had accompanied them. Some of these were of Huguenot descent, and it was to such as these that Father Saint Barbe, who had known France from childhood through his French mother, had proffered his ministrations on the outbreak of the war.

"He goes here and he goes there. He is a saint upon earth. None but love his ministrations. Saint Barbe is his name. We call him Father Saint—le saint père. Some are shocked till they come to understand. Then they know why."

Lucien met the Anglican priest almost as soon as the landing was accomplished. With the courtesy inborn in him, together with his instincts of hospitality, he had invited the guest to his own house for breakfast. The Marquise had received him graciously. Leon and he had talked in a fashion which was engrossing to hear; and when these two had betaken themselves to the house on the plage, Lucien beguiled his guest into the music-room, and settling him in that restful chair his mother often used, he discoursed sweet music to him for above two hours with scarcely a pause.

Father Saint Barbe's face expressed his quiet delight; his few words showed a keenness of appreciation which formed a link at once between the two men. The old priest was very tired. His forces had been almost exhausted before he would consent to leave his arduous task amongst the fighting forces. Twice he had been slightly wounded. He had not entirely recovered from the loss of blood and lung injury he had suffered. His beautiful old face was like ancient vellum, or alabaster with the light shining through. Such light was very vivid and beautiful as he listened to Lucien's music, and spoke with him a little of his great talent.

The day came when Leon left them. And it was in the music-room that he parted from his mother and brother. And into that parting there entered an element at once strange and sweet.

Father Saint Barbe had come up to the house upon an errand to the Marquise. And in his gentle simplicity he advanced into the house, whose doors stood wide open, and turned into the music-room, as though directed by some impulse for which he could not account.

In the doorway he paused, and stood very silently with head just bent ; for Leon was in his mother's arms, and the tears were raining down her face, though no sob passed her lips. Lucien stood beside them, speaking a few tender words to both.

The old priest did not withdraw ; but he stood in the shadows and his hands were clasped. Then he opened his lips and spoke ; and upon hearing his voice, Leon moved so that he knelt immediately before him, whilst the Marquise and Lucien both knelt where they stood. Father Saint Barbe spoke with eyes uplifted, and in speaking his words he laid his hand upon the young soldier's bent head.

" O Lord God of our fathers, Who art in every place beholding everything, favourably regard Thy humble servant before Thee, who implores Thy blessing upon this Thy soldier servant ready to go forth into the perils of war. Answer these our prayers we beseech Thee according to our confidence and hope in Thee. May the angel of Thy presence be with him. Guide and protect him in the midst of danger and perplexity. Deliver him from the arrow which destroyeth by day and the pestilence which walketh in darkness. Comfort him and those whom he loves. Soothe them in their hours of anxious watching, give unto them such patient confidence and joyful hope that they may commit unto Thee all their ways. Finally in Thy great mercy bring back this Thy servant and soldier to his own land in health and peace. Bring him back to the arms of the mother who gives

him to the service of his country. Restore him to his home in strength and joy to glorify and declare Thy goodness, and to give thanks in Thy Holy Church. Hear and accept us in the name and for the merits of Thy Son our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee, Father Almighty, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, One God, world without end. Amen."

Then they all rose, and Leon held out both hands to be grasped by those of the priest.

"Thank you, Father," he said, "I shall not forget. I go forth in the strength that is from above."

"God go with thee, my son, and His blessing and protection be upon thee."

The brothers went out together. The Marquise moved slowly forward and held out her hand. Tears still dropped from her eyes, but her face was irradiated, her voice was under control.

"I thank you, Father. I think that you were sent here of God, to tell me that He will give me back my son."

"Madame, I myself believe that this so noble son of yours will return here at length in peace. It seemed to me to be so revealed to my spirit. But whether the peace be here or in some better land, it will be well with him. I trust and believe with you also, dear Madame."

They looked one another in the eyes for awhile. Then she made a motion with her beautiful hand upon which many rare gems sparkled.

"Sit," she said, "for I have many things of which I would gladly speak, if you have time to hear me."

"I have always time to hear what any wish to say to me," he answered, and the colloquy lasted long.

Father Saint Barbe became quickly known in the streets of St. Cecilia. He was a very welcome guest at the Maison Monastère. Father Augustin and he spent many hours in converse, and the Reverend Mother and gentle Sisters came to love him, albeit a little perturbed and distressed that he was not in all ways just as they were.

But to Lenore his coming brought great comfort.

Her heart was heavy from lack of news concerning Marcus; and to Father Saint Barbe she was able to open her heart as to others she had been unable to do. He talked with her and prayed with her, and listened to all she told him with the sympathy of an understanding which she did not always feel with others. The Marquise was tender; but Lenore too often felt that she was thinking of her son Lucien, and asking whether it might not be happier for Lenore if that dream-like kinsman-husband came to her no more. Not for the world would such a suggestion have passed her lips, yet Lenore's sensitive spirit told her of the unspoken thought.

Yet in these days she and the Marquise were drawn very close together in the bonds of a new and sweet accord. There was in the Dream House a disused chapel, which was now being made ready for use. The Huguenot soldiers were invited to attend, and Father Saint Barbe, offered the service according to the Anglican form, though, of course, in the French tongue. And at the back of the little chapel Madame la Marquise de Québriac sat in silence, watchful of all, missing no word of liturgical form or the discourse which followed, so simple and so sincere.

Then later on there came an early morning hour, when a few soldiers, Lenore, her nurse, Diana and the Marquise assembled upon a Sunday morning for a sacred Feast, such as one amongst them had never attended yet in that form, and others not for very long.

The little altar was clothed in its fair white cloth. Pure white flowers were there flanking the beautiful golden cross. All was very simple, very sweet, very pure. The Father's beautiful voice gave point and meaning to every illuminating phrase. Lenore's face, raised in ecstasy of thanksgiving, wore a heavenly beauty.

Lucien had softly stolen within the doors, uncertain what would be his course. But at sight of this lovely face, and of his mother's bent head, he moved a little

nearer, and later on knelt between the two women he best loved, as the words were spoken which made him also a partaker of the bread of everlasting life and the cup of eternal salvation.

Calm before storm. Halcyon days ushering in tempest.

Often Lenore thought that this hour of blessed happiness had been hers to fortify and strengthen her for that which was about to come.

CHAPTER XXIII

DAYS SWEET—AND DAYS SAD

THE gentle winter of the south stole softly upon St. Cecilia's Isle.

In Lenore's heart great peace reigned, which seemed like the peace of her own surroundings. Dear as her home had always been to her, little as she had feared the sinister rumours overshadowing it, deep as had been her conviction that the ultimate triumph must always be with the powers of righteousness and good, the place was yet more endeared to her after the dispersion of the cloud of mystery which had enshrouded it for so long.

The machinations of wicked men had disturbed her serenity but little, and always she had attributed to mundane causes the tragedies of which from time to time the Maison Monastère had been the theatre. But the death of Jean Pitou had been a shock, and now to feel that the whole machinery of the subterranean plot had been exposed and destroyed brought with it a sense of restful security that was very grateful.

So she lived in a blessed peacefulness which was infinitely sweet; and its sweetness was intensified by her growing love for and intimacy with the Marquise. That little chapel in the Dream House was regularly used now. Father Saint Barbe had gathered about him, greatly

through the saintly magnetism of his own personality, a number of inquirers, persons who, careless in the past and not attached to any form of worship, had been awakened by the horrors of the war, and had begun to long after spiritual guiding and help, and yet were averse from submitting themselves to the somewhat stern rule of the bishop and priests of the little town. These were of a different stamp from the gentle old Father Augustin, who was not greatly in favour with them, and who held no benefice beyond that which Marcus Heristal had arranged for in connection with the little chapel upon his wife's estate.

These persons, then, mostly of the humbler sort, began to steal into the chapel—as they were told they might—in the wake of the Huguenot soldiers. The Marquise would afterwards often go amongst them, asking them of themselves and their lives. Her stately gentleness and fine discrimination won a reverential devotion from those she thus approached. Father Saint Barbe visited them, speaking their tongue as easily as his own. Lenore and her nurse tended those who were sick in their humble homes, and entered into their simple joys and sorrows with true comprehension and sympathy.

It was a great happiness to her to lose sight of her own anxieties in these simple ministrations. Some of the mothers had sent husbands or sons to France, and knew as little how it fared with them as she knew of Marcus, whom the clouds and mists of war seemed to have completely swallowed up.

She had had no letter since the one in which he seemed to seek to prepare her for his final departure—for her own widowhood. She knew that letter by heart. Every day she read it. Every day she kissed the strong signature at the foot of the page, and every day she prayed for his safe keeping and return, and begged that her own heart might remain steadfast and full of courage, and that he might be assured that she remained true to him.

She could not but know how she was regarded by her dear friends in their house, where always she was wel-

comed as a daughter. And now the tie between herself and the Marquise was more closely drawn than ever; for in the place there were some who regarded her somewhat coldly, since it was whispered that she had abjured her religion and become a heretic.

As a matter of fact it was long since the Marquise had been a "practising Catholic" as the phrase runs. She was known to have withdrawn from religious observances, save an occasional attendance at Mass. And though during the war these attendances had become more frequent, no suggestion or persuasion on the part of the ecclesiastics had persuaded her to resume any of the habits and duties of the professing members of their congregations.

But that she should open her own private chapel for service on "heretical" lines was a different matter altogether. This seemed to the hierarchy and to many of the laity also a far more serious lapse than mere abstention and practical disbelief. And the Marquise, although her position and her liberalities (which she did not withdraw) were too important to make of her an object of persecution, was very conscious of the dark looks bent upon her, and the very strong criticisms levelled at herself and her son.

For Lucien more or less followed in her steps, though he still was seen regularly at the musical services of the Cathedral, and remained on friendly terms with its organist and with any of the priests across whom he came. But now he was seeking to organize a musical service in the home chapel. It possessed a small organ of sweet tone, and some of the men had good voices and greatly enjoyed using them in this way. Lenore's beautiful singing gave strength and stability to chant and choral; and little by little the chapel attracted an increasing number of worshippers, who loved the simpler form of service, the audible offering of the Holy Scripture; and came greatly to appreciate and value the short but beautiful and spiritual addresses of the English Father,

who spoke to them from his heart in the simplest of words, giving them always some beautiful and holy thought to carry away and dwell upon from week to week.

All this brought great peace and joy into Lenore's life. She loved her talks with Father Saint Barbe, to whom she began to carry her difficulties and perplexities. Not that she loved less the Reverend Mother, the gentle devoted Sister, or the old priest who came daily to perform his office in the little chapel on the hill. She went thither with the same regularity as before. She loved its dim shadows and the gleam of the red light which always burnt before the shrine. The Oneness of the Catholic Church was to her a beautiful and compelling fact that nothing could break or change. That it was on one side a Church split up and in schism was all too clear. But her mind was able to rise above the strife and struggles of men, into that sense of unity with the Head which must in the fulness of time bring about that unity of the Body which shall convince the world. How this mystery is to be accomplished is for the moment hidden. Men are blindly feeling after it ; but in Christ alone and the Power of His Coming and Kingdom can it at last be realized.

With Father Saint Barbe she spoke much of these things, and he helped her more than the nuns or the good old priest ; for they could grasp nothing save their own form of Catholic faith, could believe in nothing wider or higher, and were just a little grieved for her that she could find help and comfort in those things upon which they looked with wondering and slightly alien eyes.

Nevertheless, they loved her and she loved them. They had always known that she was not quite of their fold, though they had confidently hoped to draw her within its safe shelter. This hope was somewhat dashed now ; yet they prayed on in hope and faith, and Lenore thanked and loved them for it. " For indeed I do desire above all things the true Catholic faith," she would tell them,

“and I feel as though I were finding it in full measure. I love you all as much as ever—and all that you love and prize. We all hold the great, beautiful, wonderful truths. We all speak the same creeds. Is not that enough?”

The soft days of the fading year were very lovely. If the gorgeous colours on land and sea were a little more dim, yet the gentle pensive tints, the dreamy distances, the soft fall of rustling leaves were infinitely soothing, and the ascetic purity of the overarching skies seemed to lie with a brooding tenderness over all. If some forms of beauty lay dying and dead, it was only that they slept awhile, to awaken afresh with the breath of the spring.

This thought came to her charged with many exquisite aspirations and meanings. The hope of Resurrection life was taking new form in her heart with her growing intimacy with Father Saint Barbe. He was looking from day to day for some realisation of its power and joy. “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” That was the promise—that glorious Coming of the Lord, which might at any moment bring to the torn and agonizing world some marvellous manifestation of redemption. That was a thought of joy and hope which was filling her with strange, mysterious happiness. It was too mystical to be spoken of with those who were not looking for it, who were content with the “toil of service” which is the spirit of Thyatira; but to those who can rise to an apprehension of what is far beyond comprehension, how great and pure a joy and hope!

So the peaceful days flowed by, preparing Lenore, as it were, for that which was coming to her; though the year had turned, and the faint stirrings of spring were in the air, before those letters came which drew a dim cloud of pain and sadness across her life.

Of the brief official letter from the War Office she could make little—gather but little from its brief stilted phrases.

Lord Heristal had been in Mesopotamia with the forces of Sir Stanley Maude. It had been the hottest season known in those parts, and the General had succumbed to cholera (as it was then said) on the 18th of September. Lord Heristal had been dispatched by him a short time previously upon some mission, the nature of which was naturally not disclosed. He had a small escort with him, and had been expected back within two or three weeks. But so far nothing had been heard of him. It had been rumoured that marauding bands of Turks and wild desert Arabs had been scouring the district, some of them in formidable numbers and well armed. Reports had come in that a small body of English soldiers had been cut off and slaughtered. It was feared that this report might refer to Lord Heristal's party. Nothing could be ascertained as to his movements, except that he had not reached his destination. It was therefore only too probable that he had perished.

There was a longer and a fuller letter from the family solicitors. It embodied the information accorded by the War Office. But this firm added that they should not feel justified at the present moment in regarding Lord Heristal's death as a certainty. There was no direct evidence forthcoming; and they by no means abandoned hope. Lord Heristal was an experienced traveller, who had passed through many perils in the past in strange and hostile lands. It was idle to deny that the fact of the world being at war greatly increased the perils he had had to face; nevertheless, there was no certainty as to his death. Lady Heristal could not return to England at present to administer the estate; and the next heir would have to be found, which might be a matter of time and difficulty, as the Heristal family had long been dwindling, and the lawyers knew no collateral of the name to succeed to the title or estate. The title might very probably lapse, in which case Lady Heristal would succeed to the property as well as the personalty. But of this they would not speak more

particularly, since they had not abandoned hope, and were of opinion that (the estate being well able to bear it) some steps might well be taken to try and ascertain the fate of the missing man. They awaited a cable from Lady Heristal sanctioning this.

The cable was instantly sent; and silence fell again like a shroud.

Lenore took her letters to the Marquise, who together with her son read them, and looked with tender sympathy into her sad, yet steadfast face.

"I am not going to think him dead," she said; "I am glad that these advisers of mine do not tell me that I should. So many return who have been thought gone for always. And Marcus is so strong, so brave, so full of resourcefulness! I cannot think of him as . . ."

She bit her lip. Her eyes suddenly filled with tears, and the Marquise folded her to her heart, where she relieved herself by a burst of tears, which did her good.

They were all very tender to her; for it was hard to be so isolated from news. Ruthless submarine activity was isolating islands more and more; and cable messages could only pass upon matters of first importance. Private cables were hard to send.

But even though she might believe her husband alive, the thought of what might be happening to him was a very terrible one. Perhaps he was a prisoner in Turkish hands. At that supposition she quivered through all her being, and could almost choose death rather than such a possible fate. And yet—ah!—she could not bear for him to die so far away from home and from herself. And perhaps he would be wondering whether she would mourn him as a wife should mourn her husband; asking himself whether it might not be better for her to be free to love again!

Lenore suddenly found how terrible that thought was to her! On her knees she prayed that it might not come to Marcus. With clasped hand and face raised to

the red light which spoke of everlasting love she strove to plead against that sad suggestion.

“Dear Son of God—Son of a holy human mother—who reads the secrets of all hearts, and with whom lies all power of consolation—let not my husband think that of me! That I, his wife, who loves him, reveres him, longs for him back, should by any thought or act or word belittle that sacred bond which unites us! Let his trust in me be even as mine in him! His goodness is so great. What has he not done for me! And yet it is not for these things that I love him! It is because he is so noble, so true—my husband, to whom I have been joined before God’s altar, and whom I must love as I vowed to do—as I have done ever since. Dear loving Father, the blessed angels who minister to the heirs of salvation are ever round Thy throne in Heaven. I pray that some angel messenger may fly from Thee to him. Grant, I beseech Thee, that some message of love and comfort may be vouchsafed to him, wherever he is. Keep him safe from suffering of body or of mind. Let him feel my love around him, as I have felt his around me through all these long months and years of waiting. And bring him back to me in Thy good time. I pray it, I pray it for Jesus’ sake.”

And Lenore knew that the gentle nuns and the saintly priest joined their prayers to hers; for they loved the English milord who had given them this home here upon the hill.

Father Saint Barbe was another comforter. He knew well something of the peril in which Marcus Heristal must stand, if indeed he still lived, away in those wild lands so full of warlike bands, men fierce and cruel and leagued together against the Allied forces sent to meet them. Yet he had known too many strange and miraculous escapes from peril not to see great cause for hope; and before his altar he too made supplication and prayer, and the name of Marcus Heristal became familiar to those who worshipped in that little sanctuary, where

Lenore's sweet clear voice was lifted so often and where her face was known and loved.

CHAPTER XXIV

MAISON DE LA MISÉRICORDE

NURSE FROME with her high courage and optimistic temperament was perhaps Lenore's best companion in these days. A sincerely good woman, she was yet more matter-of-fact and less mystical and imaginative than the girl's other friends and confidants. She declared she felt it "in her bones" that the master was yet alive. And as for his wife giving him up—the thought was ridiculous! He would cheat the Huns—or the Turks—yet! They would see that before long! A traveller like himself—of course he would escape their clutches! He might not get back to his lines very quickly—perhaps not at all. But he would turn up safe and sound at the Maison Monastère one of these days, perhaps without warning.

Nurse Frome's ideas of geography were a little vague. But she declared that as like as not he would disguise himself and get through the desert somehow, and so reach Algiers and take a ship across to St. Cecilia. And though Lenore could scarcely regard this as practical politics, it cheered her to hear such words spoken, and often she would lie through the shadowy night, musing and praying and picturing her husband making his slow and weary way across wild wastes, till he should arrive at the haven where he would be.

Down in the home of the De Québriacs, mother and son talked often and softly together.

Lucien's face wore a rather strained expression; but he spoke to his mother with quiet composure and resolution.

“Do not think that I desire that a good and great man should perish. Far be that from me! If he could make her happy by his return I would indeed rejoice. For I think my love is strong enough to joy in that which makes for her happiness. It is only sometimes that I wonder if she knows what the power and scope of love really is. . . .”

“She did not when she came, my son. But I think she has learned it now.”

“Then who has taught her?”

Mother and son exchanged glances. He flushed suddenly, and then grew pale.

“Mother, I have never wronged her—or him—by a thought.”

“You need not tell me that, my son.” And again their glances crossed.

“Only,” his voice was scarcely a whisper. “If loss and desolation should fall upon her, may God grant to me to be her comforter.”

The lovely spring-tide ran its course, and dreaming summer brooded over the land. But the silence concerning Marcus, Lord Heristal, remained unbroken, and the wistful sadness deepened in the eyes of Lenore.

Yet she spent no time in useless repinings. That would be no tribute to her husband’s memory whether he still lived or whether he had passed over into that brighter land towards which her own feet were set. “Gone west” was the phrase of the British soldier; and as Lenore was wont to stand upon her terrace at sun-down, gazing into the mysteries of light and colour which herald the dying of the day, as she seemed to see great shining gates thrown wide, as though to welcome home those who upon that day had made for country and cause the supreme sacrifice, tears would often add a more sparkling brilliance to the radiance upon which she gazed, and her lips would sometimes move in whispered speech.

"My Marcus—husband mine—is it that thou art passing thitherward to-night? Or is it perhaps that thou hast been there, in that light, a great while now? Art thou waiting there for me, my loved one? And I am so young still, so young! The time will be so long! Only in the great white light of Eternity where time is not, perhaps no weariness can try the spirit. Years may be as moments there in the sunny fields of Paradise."

It was to Father Saint Barbe she unburdened her spirit, very soon after that first announcement which told her that she might even now have been several months a widow.

"I must do something with my life, Father. And my dear kind Nurse Frome will stay with me as my companion and friend. I feel that my life will be spent here, for if my husband returns to me, here it is that I would fain meet him. If otherwise, I think that I would choose for my life to be spent in the place he made beautiful for me, and placed me in. But it is a great house—wider and larger than I can ever fill. I want to use it in some sort as a memorial to his dear memory, who gave his life to the great cause."

"I understand that feeling, my child. Have you any further plan of that which you would wish to do for his memory?"

"Father, we think now that the war wanes. This year, Leon wrote, might bring it to its close. But how many wrecked and ruined lives will it leave in its trail! Those poor *éclopés*! I think of them by day and by night. Some whose homes have been wrecked—who have none to care for them—and we know that France cannot provide as England can do for her disabled soldiers. Yet they gave themselves for us as well as for France.

"Father, let me show you those great rooms I have in the north wing of my house. The servants' quarters are there also; but there is much space never used by me. I will show you. I have talked it over with my

household and with my dear nurse. All are willing, All are even eager. I have spoken to M. le Maire, and he will do all that is possible to further my scheme.

"I would bring from poor stricken France twenty of her *éclopés*, and I would give them asylum here. I have the means. I have the will. And it would be a task which I feel in my heart would approve itself to my husband. I think it will be a fitting tribute to his memory, if indeed he be dead. If he should return, I am very sure that he will be glad of that which I have done. I think that he may even extend its scope farther. For he is truly noble and of a great heart."

"And yours is a noble scheme, my child. Do I not know, who have worked through so many of war's horrors in France, how desperate must of necessity be the case of many and many of those poor patient *éclopés*? Indeed, in many cases of desperate injury there has not been the same fight for their lives in French as in English hospitals. It has been doubted whether it were true mercy to save such human wrecks for that which must follow for them. And the grand patience of the men themselves! 'What would you—it cannot be helped. France is bled to death by her ruthless foe. We must do what we can, we others. But for many it is better to die.' And indeed, though our hearts shed tears of blood, we know that this is all too true."

Tears stood in Lenore's eyes.

"I know, I know. I have been hearing and learning—a little all these years. And that is why I long to do what I can."

And so it came about that the Maison Monastère won for itself a new and sweeter name; for as the summer days drew on a trickle of broken, crippled heroes, ghastly objects at the first, found the way to the house on the hill, and the people of St. Cecilia's Isle began to call it La Maison de la Miséricorde.

There was a little garden set especially aside for them

to which the windows of their lower rooms gave access. It was a place of flowers, walled round, well furnished, with niches that made seats upon which they could sit for hours at a time, gazing about them, listening to the bird-songs, inhaling sweet scents, and losing by very slow degrees that crushed and battered aspect, and that pitiful expression of exhaustion and lassitude, with which they all arrived.

Diana threw herself heart and soul into Lenore's work, and Dr. Rodin placed all his skill at the disposal of the poor broken wrecks of humanity. Nurse Frome's cheerful personality, her skill, her broken French which pleased them almost more than anything, made of her a most enlivening influence. She devised games; she was full of expedients. She would provide a chair which could contain two one-legged men at a time, provided one had lost a left and the other a right leg. She would set them all laughing, and Diana's bird-like trill was always enough to cause a ripple of delight to pass through room or garden. There were three blind men amongst the *éclopés*—blind and maimed as well. And Diana would lead them with unfailing patience here, there and all over that portion of house and garden which was their domain. She would explain to them exactly what it looked like. She would teach them to feel their way about. She would take them into the cloister sometimes, where they could pace up and down very soon without assistance, guided by the wall on one side and the low coping between the arcaded pillars on the other.

It was the armless men, or those badly disfigured in the face, who were most difficult to deal with. They shrank with such a sense of morbid shame from being seen. But Dr. Rodin's skill with shattered faces was marvellous, his patience unwearied. Diana and Nurse Frome shrank from nothing that could aid and abet his skill, and bit by bit the dreadful sense of lifelong humiliation and isolation would leave them.

Arms were found for empty sleeves; and though these were of little use, the men who had shrunk away from even friendly glances began to smile afresh. It was not the one-armed who felt the disablement so keenly. It was those who had lost both (of whom three had reached the Maison de Miséricorde) who began by a pitiful shrinking from even kindly eyes. But Nurse Frome would have none of it! She learned new French words in which to chaff them. She made them slings for mock arms, or stuffed a mock hand into a coat pocket, and declared no one would guess! She even began to walk them about the *plage*, when on some suitable days Diana would come dashing up behind the white mules for a contingent of *éclopés* to take for an airing. How they laughed to see those big white mules! How they began to look forward to those drives down the zig-zag roads, and the walk up and down the *plage*, where people came and talked with them, gave them cigarettes, asked about the Maison de Miséricorde, and listened with such interest to all they were told of it.

Lenore seldom took these excursions. She better liked remaining with those who were weak and shy still. She and the Sisters would coax them out into the wider gardens, the orchards, or the enclosure where the fragrant herbs grew. Some of them became eager to learn herb lore, and one of the blind men showed a simply marvellous skill in shredding certain herbs and preparing them for Sister Eulalie's further manipulations. The lame men also begged tasks about the gardens, and began to make themselves useful in many little ways which lightened their load of infirmity.

Lenore had a scale of payment for these services. At the first they begged her not to pay them; but when she asked in her gentle way—

“Would you not like to have something to send to France for those other *éclopés* of whom there are so many, so many? Shall we not think also a little of them?” Then their faces lightened eagerly, and they

sought ways of performing any offices within the limits of their powers, Dr. Rodin nodding his head with great satisfaction.

"Good, good—excellent! They march those boys, they march! You are a wonderful lady, Lady Heristal! I kiss your hand. The sight of your face works more healing than my medicines; and this house of pity is indeed a home of peace and joy."

Diana's face was brilliantly happy in these days; for Leon was still safe! And he was now working with the staff, a man of much value to his Generals. His duty did not carry him into the heart of the peril. And as the summer passed there gradually dawned upon the world the consciousness that of a certainty the war was nearing its close!

The *éclopés* had said it when they came. It was the ray of brightness which helped to cheer them on their way. Not yet—for there was still much fight left in the foe—but behind their devastated lines, crossing the seas to their aid, was a power so mighty and so menacing that it was bringing even the hardest enemy counsel to pause. Probably they would not wait for that great power to assert itself in the field. The menace would suffice. That is what the world was saying. The end must be almost within sight. And oh, to live again in a world at peace! Peace which would bring back Leon to his home—peace which would mean release of prisoners, the return of so many reported dead! And when Lenore saw the radiance in Diana's eyes, her own would light with an unquenchable hope; for who could say whether, when peace came, Marcus would not himself return—and come to her here—to his home?

With her arms around her friend's neck Diana spoke of her coming happiness.

"Oh, Lenore, when I think of all these years of awful suspense, it fills me with a joy that is almost awe. He has been through it all—and has been kept safe, as you taught us to believe!"

Lenore's face shone with a lovely light, as she heard Diana's words.

"It makes me very happy that you should both love me so much. But it was not I who taught you—it was God Himself; and that saintly Father Saint Barbe."

"Ah, yes," said Diana eagerly. "How much we owe to him! Maman said that when he blessed Leon before he went away, she felt that her son was to be brought safe through. It was as though a shield and buckler were placed about him as he knelt."

"I know. She told me so. It is beautiful the defences we have. That is how I feel about my husband. That angel guardian may be watching over him still. How it helps, that sweet confidence!"

Diana regarded her with a wistful wonder.

"You are still thinking that, dearest Lenore? After all this long, weary time?"

"Yes," she answered, looking away towards the shining west. "I am still watching and waiting and hoping. Why should I not? No news has come that need quench my hope. No one can attest his death. Why should I give up looking for him back?"

To Diana there was something strangely pathetic in this attitude of mind. Many there had been at the first who had held it; for so many strange returns took place after reported deaths had brought mourning and woe to hearts and homes. But after all these long months—after wellnigh a year of utter silence—was not that pushing confidence and even faith to an extreme limit?

"Darling," she half whispered, "how long shall you let yourself hope on without any food for hope? Oh, Lenore, it seems almost more hard sometimes than giving them up! Hope deferred . . . and when it goes on and on and on! It must make life so difficult!"

"Why difficult, dear? It does not seem so to me. I am doing here what I feel sure that Marcus would

love for me to do. You know what I have always felt about this Maison Monastère? That it is not quite my own as another place might be. Once I had a dream of giving it back into the hands and keeping of the Church. But that might be difficult and complicated now. And I cannot be sure that Marcus would approve. But surely I may dedicate it to beautiful uses. I love to hear them speak of it as the Maison de Miséricorde! And should more and more time go by without bringing my husband back to me, then I may make changes here, and take in more and more of the shattered wrecks of the war. In that work I can find happiness. I can feel that my husband smiles at me from his home in that west whither sooner or later I may come to believe he is waiting me. . . ."

"Lenore, Lenore, you will not always live in that dream!" pleaded Diana, whose young blood ran like a vital flood through her veins, whose body often tingled with the potentialities of life and strength and glories to be revealed. "Ah, listen, and do not think that I am not in sympathy with you, for indeed, indeed I am. I think your fidelity is a most holy and beautiful thing. You know, I have prayed and prayed with you for his return. . . ."

"Indeed I do know it; my dear one, we have had beautiful hours together."

"Yes, yes; and if our prayers meet the answer we long after, how glorious it will be! But Lenore, Lenore, we cannot always reckon upon this. And if later—if you come to know—that he cannot come back to you—what then?"

"Dear, I have been telling you just now. . . ."

"Ah, but I do not mean that! I love for this house to be a Maison de Miséricorde. You know what I feel for your work and the poor *éclopés*! I, too, will work for them, come amongst them, love them! If my home in the future be in St. Cecilia, I shall love to be often here in this house on the hill. But, Lenore,

Lenore—we who are so young—we who have our lives before us!—we cannot just live for those poor *éclopés*! We need a life of our own. Ah, my dearest, do you not understand? ”

Still Lenore's face was turned towards the west. There was a light upon it which Diana did not fully understand. She waited awhile, and then, as Lenore did not speak, she herself broke the silence with a few whispered words.

“ Lenore, Lenore, do you not understand? What we need, what we want in our lives, is the grace and glory—of love ! ”

Something flamed in Lenore's eyes at the sound of that word, and in her voice was a strange thrill.

“ Ah, love,” she whispered, “ love, love, love ! ” her voice dying into silence.

Diana could not read her soul, but softly she stole her arms about her neck.

“ Yes, love,” she whispered back. “ Oh, that love which is so great, so wonderful! The love that thrills you through and through, that beats out the music of the spheres.” She caught her breath, and holding Lenore fast about the neck she added: “ The love that begets that miracle of life—the life that goes on and on through the ages, the fruit of holy love and hallowed union! Lenore, Lenore, try to understand! It is all so wonderful—so great—so God-like. From all eternity—Father, Son, the wonderful relationship! And then motherhood—made so infinitely sacred, through the Incarnation of the Eternal Son. And that is God's great miraculous gift to us women. Oh, Lenore, Lenore—try to understand. It is waiting for you—a love so deep, so true! We are not asked to carry fidelity beyond the grave. Ah, think of it—think of it! Love is so splendid, so wonderful! And it would be yours, yours, yours, Lenore. You have only to put your hand and take it ! ”

CHAPTER XXV

LUCIEN

THE world had held its breath, as it were, awaiting an announcement which would change the face of all Europe—upon which the fate of civilisation might be said to hang.

Armistice!—the harbinger of peace—the herald of hostility's cessation! And it had come! All over the world the wires were flashing the news. Men were seeking to realize all that it meant. Soldiers were lying sunk in deep sleep, where a few hours before the rain of shot and shell had been tearing the ground to pieces. Bells were pealing, songs of praise and thanksgiving were rising from houses of prayer and homes stately and humble. And in the music-room of the house upon the *plage*, Lucien's fingers were bringing forth the deep tones of a great *Te Deum*, whilst Lenore's voice rose in notes of liquid gold, as she lifted it in those splendid words which have rung down the ages from generation to generation.

War's end! For none believed that hostilities would recommence. Exhaustion was too complete with the ruthless foe that had plunged the world into depths of unimagined horror, evoking a tempest which none other nation on earth would have dreamed of stirring up. Whatever else betided, whether for weal or woe, no thinking man believed that the thunder of the guns would awaken again. Strife of words, and many other forms of strife there might be to face; but the age-long war had ended.

That was in November. And before the year closed, so Leon wrote, he might be with them! What joy: The Marquise held Diana fast in her arms and whispered!

“My child, why should not your espousals take place

upon the Jour de l'An? Could a better day be chosen for such a happy consummation?"

Glowing with happiness, Diana hid her face on the breast of the Marquise, she trembled with the ecstasy of her joy.

But for Lenore came none of those tidings she had waited for.

Letters now reached them without trouble or peril. She received many communications from the lawyers who had her husband's affairs in charge. Their efforts to learn the fate of Lord Heristal had been unfruitful. A clue here and there had been followed up ; but no certain tidings had reached them. The nearest approach to information which might be relevant was a story told by some Arabs of a small body of English soldiers who had been surrounded and cut off, made prisoners by Turks, rescued by Arabs, hostile to Turkish rule, though not especially friendly to Englishmen; their escape again from these doubtful allies, and their plunge into desert solitudes. Then had come another tale of a small band answering somewhat to this description, caught by a suddenly rising flood in some other locality untraceable. It was believed that all had perished. And beyond these two rumoured tales, which might or might not be relevant to the inquiry after Lord Heristal, nothing had been learned. The War Office had long given him up as dead, and the men of affairs respectfully hinted that they themselves had lost hope, and began to think that Lady Heristal must needs decide to administer her husband's estate as his widow.

So far as was known at present there was no Heristal to carry on the line. At the outbreak of the war there had been one distant kinsman of the name, with whom Lord Heristal had put them in touch. But he was a young man and unmarried, and had been killed two years ago. The title therefore would become extinct, and Lady Heristal would succeed to all that her husband had to leave. There was no immediate necessity for her

presence in England, and no harm in waiting a few months longer, to see whether the war's close in any way changed the situation. But with the advance of spring, had no news been received to change their opinions, they would respectfully suggest that she should come over and confer with them and do her part in reference to the business pending.

Lenore drew a long breath ; but there was respite yet. The spring might bring its own message of life and hope. And if her own were growing just a little dim and faint, she scarcely let her own spirit know it. Always her time and thoughts were full. For the house of pity had more inmates with war's close ; and her heart went out in overwhelming desire to help the helpless, soothe the suffering, and bring back some of the joy of life to broken wrecks who had thought only to creep into some shadowy corner to die.

Lucien watched her with deep love-filled eyes. She knew him for her best and truest helper in all her plans. Their friendship was one of the factors in her life which had helped her perhaps more than anything else through the long years of waiting and watching, and was helping her still. He knew it, and for him that was a deep delight. He dwelt upon the joy of it, nor would he often let disturbing thought trouble the waters of his soul. She treated him with the loving confidence of a sweet sister. Let that for the present suffice him.

But with the wane of the year, whilst watching the deepening wistfulness in Lenore's sweet eyes ; with the arrival of regular mails bringing no tidings of the missing Lord Heristal, now officially declared to be dead, there came upon Lucien an almost passionate longing for a different relationship. And to his mother at last his words broke forth with the fervour which comes from long restraint.

"Mother, tell me ! Have I waited long enough ? How much longer need I hold silence ? What can I

do? I love her so truly, so deeply, so passionately! I want her! I ache for her! Body and soul and spirit cry out for her! I have fought it; I have kept myself in check. I have not wronged that absent husband by so much as a thought. But now—if indeed she be free—Mother, have I held silence long enough?”

“My son, I have watched and kept vigil with you. My heart has often been sorely pressed. The situation is so strange. The bride-wife all these years alone, cherishing her ideal! Often have I asked the question—Does she understand what that hallowed union means? What is the quality of that love she cherishes for the husband for whom she waits? And I have not yet been assured of the answer. Lucien, my son, it may be that you may be one to teach her some beautiful truth which yet remains hidden from her. And thus she may find consolation.”

His eyes took a great shining; yet he very slightly shook his head.

“Time was, mother mine, when I myself thought this thing. But I do not think it now. What has taught her the lesson of love I cannot tell; but I feel that now she knows its depths and height and breadth. And ah, how it makes me long for the day when perhaps I may win that love for myself!”

“Then, my son, why not speak?”

“May I, mother? Dost thou say it? Dost thou bless me on such quest?”

“My son, has not thy happiness and welfare been ever my chiefest desire? Thine and Leon’s—my two children, who have been as sons and daughters to me in their tenderness and love? And can I think of that happiness so soon to come to Leon without desiring the same great gift for my first-born, my Lucien? Go then, my son, and may God prosper thee in thy mission! Such love as thine comes from Him. Surely it will not come in vain.”

Lenore was alone in her garden in the evening hour

when Lucien found her. It was a soft, sweet eventide in the heart of the winter ; but that word seemed too harsh for the gentle season of the year's dying which came to St. Cecilia.

To Lenore it sometimes seemed as though the beauty of the winter sunsets almost transcended those of summer. There was often such a mystic blending of emerald and amethyst and primrose in the translucent sky ; the wonderful crimson light about the sinking sun was so intense. The azure and turquoise of the distant vault was so infinitely peaceful, whilst the golden gates of the west held for her an entrancement of the senses for which she could find no name. There were moments when with clasped hands she found it hard not to exclaim in eager almost passionate words—

“ I am coming, Marcus, I am coming. Ah, can you not wait for me ! ”

Lucien found her in such a moment ; and stood silent at the look upon the face which was for him the very centre of his spirit's world. For a few moments she did not know he was so near ; but the intensity of his gaze seemed at last to draw hers. She looked at him smiling.

“ Do I intrude, Lenore ? ” he gently asked. His heart was beating in a fashion which made speech a little difficult.

“ No,” she answered softly, “ I often come out here at sunset, to think. But you will not disturb my thoughts, Lucien, my friend.”

He took a seat beside her. He would not look too straightly in her face. Besides, it was a little turned away again, towards the western sky.

“ Of what do you come to think, Lenore ? ” he asked.

With her hands lightly clasped together she answered calmly.

“ Of my husband, Lucien. You know what the men call it—gone west. And so I come out in the evening

hour, to think of Marcus, who perhaps . . .” She did not finish her sentence, but with her clasped hands she made a little gesture towards the sunset, which was at once pathetic and suggestive. Lucien felt his heart going like the clapper of a bell. How hard to find the words he sought !

“ Lenore, I have not tried to speak to you for long of this great loss which you have sustained. I never knew your noble husband. Yet always have I honoured him for his great qualities. Without such he could not have won a heart like yours. And yet when his country and mine made the call he left all to follow and serve. He kept nothing back. He offered himself upon the great Altar of Sacrifice. Shall we not call him blessed ? ”

Lenore never turned her face from the western sky ; but she put out her hand, and laid it upon Lucien’s.

“ Thank you,” she softly said. “ It helps me when people understand.”

He very reverently took her hand, and held it between his. Nor did she try to withdraw it. After a pause he spoke again.

“ Lenore, I have not dared to ask for long now. Is it that you have given up the expectation of seeing again, in this life, your noble husband ? ”

“ Lucien, how can I answer that question ? I cannot answer it ; for in truth I do not know what to say. I know that my own world has lost hope. I know that by others I should be bidden to let the hope die. I have talked with Dr. Rodin, who knows much. I have talked with Father Saint Barbe and Father Augustin, who greatly understand. And I do not think that any of these dare bid me hope on longer. . . .”

Her voice died softly away ; but no tears started, only the yearning gaze of her eyes became more and more intense. As Lucien did not speak she presently continued :

“ And so, of late, I come more and more to watch the

glory of the west. It seems to bring us nearer together. I feel that if not here, he is surely—there ! ” She withdrew very gently the hand so gently held. “ And as I watch those unfolding gates of the west a great peace falls upon me. I feel as though we were so very near together.”

“ Your love for him, then, was very great, Lenore ? ”

She turned her deep eyes upon him, and they looked full one at the other for a measurable space of time. His heart thrilled within him.

“ Yes,” she answered slowly and dreamily, “ I had loved Marcus for long before I married him. He was my father’s friend—and mine ; and was very kind to us. His coming was one of my delights, and I felt that he cared for me and understood me as my own dear father never had done.”

“ That was not exactly love, Lenore,” he said very gently. “ Not the love I mean.”

“ I know,” she gently answered. “ Ah, do I not know ! And, Lucien, though Marcus was very dear to me when I married him, I did not fully understand even then what I was doing, what I was promising. Yet, when I took those vows upon my lips, something deep in my heart whispered to me that one day I should know ! And Lucien, since I have lived here, since my husband has been amid all those awful perils, shrinking from nothing, only going forward at the call of duty, yet always with his tender heart full of love towards me—I have come to understand what love means, what it is, what it will be through all eternity ! And I love my husband with everything that is in me, body, soul and spirit ; and I await the time when we shall meet again—and I can tell him all.”

There was a beautiful light upon her face which almost transfigured it. He gazed at her and dropped his eyes. She turned to him and spoke the word he would not do.

“ Yes, he may be dead, in one sense of the word,

Lucien. But love is so much stronger than death that sometimes I almost tell myself that it draws us closer instead of putting us apart."

"Lenore, Lenore!" he broke out, and then as suddenly stopped.

"Lucien," she said very softly, "I will give you my husband's last letter to read. I never part from it. It lies always near my heart. He knew that he might be going to his death, and he was thinking of me and of my future more than of anything besides, because his love for me was stronger than death. No one has seen the words of that letter, Lucien; but you shall see them now."

She drew forth a folded paper, and gave it him. It was warm and faintly scented, and he thrilled strangely as he took and unfolded it. It was Marcus Heristal's last words to the wife he loved, when he felt himself to be going forth upon a mission from which there might very well be no return.

She did not move away as he read those pregnant words. She sat very still beside him, her face turned towards the west, from which the radiance was slowly dying. Was the light of human love, perhaps, dying softly from her own life also?

When he had finished, he reverently folded the paper as it was before, and handed it back to her.

"It is a noble letter, Lenore. I thank you for letting me see it."

"Is it not?" she said, "noble—and so like him! Lucien, do you understand its message to me—to my innermost heart?"

Very gently he answered, steadying his voice.

"Does it not mean that he thinks first of your happiness, Lenore? He knows that with him it may not be possible such human happiness can be realized; therefore he bids you feel full freedom to find it—with—another."

"Yes," she answered very softly, "that is what he

meant. But Lucien, can you not understand the inner meaning of that message to me?"

Very slowly Lucien felt his heart die within him. She was looking at him now with a mystery of feeling in her eyes. He felt before she spoke that the knell of his hopes had sounded.

"Lucien," she softly continued, as though he had spoken the words which trembled on his tongue, "do not think—never think—that I do not prize that love you have never, in your chivalrous reverence for one who is gone, offered me by word of mouth. It is for me a possession which I hold in such esteem that I would I could take it in its purity and entirety. But I cannot. Why this is I cannot tell; but I feel that somewhere Marcus is waiting for me. Some day he will come to me—or I shall go to him. It may be our meeting will be—yonder—out west—where the glory shines for me each day. And Lucien, I feel that I must go to him as he left me. I cannot put it differently. But nothing—no one must stand between us. If I hurt you by these words, forgive me. If I could do that which you desire, I would. But I cannot. I belong to Marcus. And he has bound me to him more by his generous renunciation of me, than even by his great love in the past. I must be for him, as he has been for me. Lucien, can you forgive me? I cannot speak otherwise. But believe me, you come next. I think you are as noble a man as he. More I cannot say."

He bared his head, he knelt a moment and pressed his lips to her hands. Then he was gone, and the shadows of coming night were about her. Had she put away the light of love which might have gilded the darkness of her own sky's horizon!

Suddenly a beam of light struck upwards from the fading west and shot up towards the zenith with a blaze of glory. With clasped hands she watched it.

"An omen?" she whispered, "or a promise?"

CHAPTER XXVI

LEON

NOT quite as soon as they had hoped, yet very early in the first year of the peace which men had scarcely learned as yet to call by that name, Leon came back to them.

In the pale grey dawn of a Sunday morning, a small vessel from France cast anchor in the bay. The Marquise going forth in the first glow of the clear shining of the new day, saw her two sons coming towards her through the avenue of the orange-trees, the golden light misty behind them, light on their faces and in their eyes.

"Maman, Maman!" Leon sprang forward. His mother was clasped in his arms. Her crystal tears rained down upon his shoulder as he held her—so fast—so fast.

"Thou art come back to me, my boy, my son! May the good God be blessed and praised!"

He held her closer to his heart. How strong were those long, lean arms of his! How good to be thus held!

"Maman, Maman! Say that again! Say it again! The good God! Ah, how sweet are those words upon thy dear lips! Now we are one indeed! Maman, is it not sweet?"

She lifted her head, she looked him in the eyes.

"My child, how much have we to thank that good God for! I, alas! played no true mother's part to my children. I left them groping in darkness. And yet they have found light! To Him be the glory and the praise!"

Very low were Leon's next words spoken:

"One has need indeed to find Him in the furnace of battle, ma mère; else we could not bear it."

"Come, brother," said Lucien's quiet voice beside them,

"come, my mother. Father Saint Barbe is arriving. The others are coming. It will be a beautiful welcome to Leon—here in our little chapel in this hour of sweetness and dawn. Shall we go together?"

Leon drew his mother's hand within his arm, Lucien walked upon her other side. And so Diana saw them as she entered the little chapel, where the Feast was spread; and the little thrill of joy and thanksgiving could be felt through that small gathering, even before the Father spoke the words, with a quiver in his beautiful voice, standing there at the altar of blessing and thanksgiving.

Diana knelt beside him, and on the other side his mother, as they received the mystical tokens of redemption and eternal life.

Then Lucien stole to the organ, and just before the final benediction was spoken, the notes of a glorious *Te Deum* pealed forth.

Lenore was there to lead with her lovely voice, others joined in with all the power they possessed. Leon's deep tones gave body to the splendid harmonies, and the sounds of praise and thanksgiving went ringing upwards, till surely they must have found an echo in the vault of Heaven itself.

Later on, Leon knelt for the individual benediction of the old priest.

"You sent me forth with blessings on my head, and words of promise which I have cherished in my heart. Voice for me now, Father, that joy of thanksgiving which is mine, together with a blessing upon the life lying before me."

Father Saint Barbe and Lenore both shared the morning meal of the *De Québriacs*. And Diana was placed beside Leon, as one who had the right to be there. He looked into her eyes many times; but they spoke little, their hearts were too full.

He answered many questions, told them wonderful and splendid things. Yet it was not of war and strife

that they now longed to speak and think, though not at once could that dense cloud be banished from lives and hearts.

Later, in the gardens together, Leon spoke to his betrothed.

"Art thou ready, my queen, my heart's delight? I am hungry for thee—for our life together! I have such dreams of those weeks we will take far away from all the world beside—away from even those whom we love. Just together—thou and I—in a desert place which our loves shall make to blossom as a rose. Diana—wilt thou come?"

Scarce was there need to ask it; for was she not already all his—all his?

To his brother in speaking a little of his coming joy he put a gently intimate question; for upon Lucien's face there was a look which pierced his heart.

"Surely also for thee, my brother, this day of glory will also dawn."

"I think not, Leon. I know what is in thy heart. Yet I think not. None now believe that Lord Heristal can ever return to his wife. And she is for me, as thou hast divined, the one mate of my soul. Yet I do not believe she will ever be mine. And, Leon, I am coming almost to be content. She is to me so perfect, that I scarce dare to wish her other than she shows herself—so gloriously faithful."

Leon, when he visited the Maison de la Miséricorde, which he did with the greatest interest, began to understand.

What a place that was! How his heart had been torn and rent these past years in the thought of those battered, shattered human things which had once been strong fighting men! What was to be done for them? How could they be served, comforted, repaid for all their sufferings and their devotion? How could it be done?

Well, it could not. The nemesis of war would lie heavy and grim over the world for long. And yet, here

and there were bright spots in the darkness. And Leon went among the *éclopés* a welcome guest, followed by smiles, greeted by eager questions, and always entreated to sit awhile amongst them and tell them of that last glorious chase of the Hun back to his own land, and the march of victorious Allied troops up to the Rhine and across it!

The men who had legs would stamp them. The men who had hands would clap them. All faces would grow eager, triumphant, unfeignedly full of delight. Laughter would ripple through the great room where they were assembled round the stove; eyes would shine with appreciation and pride. And Leon, looking round, would say in varying forms of words—

“And to you, my braves, as much as to the men who drove them over their borders, does the world owe this great thing! Each one of you in spirit was there! It was your work as much as ours who saw it done. And France owes it to each of you as well as to her generals and her guns and her ships that her soil is freed from the pollution and the humiliation of the defilement of those human devils. Comrades, I salute you!”

They were on their feet in a moment at that word. They were proud and happy men. Leon's words made them very glad at heart.

Lenore showed him all her arrangements. There were thirty inmates of that house of pity now. And she was hoping little by little to prepare for more.

“And some of them go from us,” she said with happy, shining eyes—“Dr. Rodin is so wonderful. Two of my lame men have new legs, and these can go with the boats and fish. M. le Maire arranges homes for them nearer the *plage*. They have a little pension—a very tiny one; but already they begin to earn. That gives them great joy. And my blind men already learn to make baskets and creels. Two of them have found homes up in the hills where the osiers grow, and where they share the life of the peasants—being themselves from peasant

homes. And even my poor armless men begin to talk of doing things! One walks daily to the presbytery of St. Pierre. The good old priest there is almost blind, and this man has some education. He reads to him for three hours each day. Another gives a little oral teaching to some of the children round. Perhaps we may one day have a tiny school, where little backward children may come—those poor little *crétins* of whom there are always some in the villages behind. They are so eager to do things for themselves, my brave *éclopés*! And though they do not like to leave us here, they say, 'But that will make room for another—and there are so many more!' It is beautiful to hear them. Then every Sunday I send round and gather them together here for dinner with the others. How happy then are they; and how proud to tell what they are doing and earning!"

Her sweet face was turned to him with a shining which made his heart contract as he thought of his brother. No wonder Lucien loved her! But how far removed she seemed from all mundane thoughts of personal happiness! She lived for others, and her face showed it.

"And the Reverend Mother, and those two dear Sisters—how good they are! And how they help them—my poor patient men! They are so wise, and they teach them holy mysteries as I could never do. They seem to live so near to Heaven themselves! And our little chapel! Now we have our services always so well attended. There is no compulsion; but the men love to come! And they begin to enter into all the beautiful meanings of what they see and hear. Father Augustin gives them instruction. Some have been careless in the past. One has been even a criminal. But they are learning—they are caring for higher, holier things. Yes, we are very happy up here in our house, where monks once lived a dedicated life, and where often it seems as though angel wings hover over us still."

He looked at her gravely, steadily, questioningly.

"And is this the life to which you are dedicated?" he asked.

"I think so," she answered gently. "I am still praying for the return of my husband, though I have resigned him into God's keeping; and if he may not come to me here I do not repine. But if I am to live my life what you might call alone, I shall live it here amongst my dear people who love me and whom I love. For I think that so would Marcus love for me to pass my time, when my duties and cares in England have been wound up. This is the place he bought for me, gave to me, sent me to. Here I feel nearer to him than I could elsewhere. My heart's home seems to me here. And my *éclopés* will be my children."

Again the sweetness of her smile smote him strangely; yet he began to understand better his brother's words. This gentle and beautiful fidelity to an ideal haloed her about and set her in some sort apart. He could not wish for it to be disturbed, even as Lucien himself had said.

Leon and Diana were married a fortnight after his return. He must needs give to his mother and brother those days, before he carried away his bride across into Africa as he had planned. He wanted to show her some of the wonders of the desert in which he had wandered in past years, when he had seen service in Algeria. He pined after silence and solitude with the woman that he loved; and Diana would have gone with him to the world's end.

The civil ceremony took place at the Mairie, and there was a reception at the Maison Morisco, which all the world attended to congratulate the gallant soldier upon his safe return, and admire the vivid beauty of his bride.

But very few were present when in the little chapel of the house Father Saint Barbe had in the glow of the early morning given to them the blessing of wedded

trothplight, and had joined them together, never to be put asunder, according to the beautiful form of his orders.

There were not a few who asked and wondered why no religious ceremony in the Cathedral took place. But the world had come by this time pretty well to understand that the De Québriacs had found their happiness in another form of faith amongst believers who claimed for themselves a Catholic liberty which the Catholicism of Rome denied them.) Without doubt it was a pity—or so their world said; but in these days what would you? (Men must think and judge for themselves.) The Marquise had always done so. And none had thought the worse of the family for drawing their own conclusions and leaving trodden paths. They have never been orthodox these De Québriacs, but always liberal and honourable and of fine traditions. If they did prefer a heretical Father for their adviser, who was the worse for it?

In the heart of the golden desert Leon and his young wife wandered. They had their headquarters at Biskra; but they rode far and wide through great rolling spaces, where they and their few attendants seemed altogether alone in a world of azure and gold.

They did not always talk much. Leon loved to lie upon the hot sand, his head against Diana's knees, his sun helmet tilted over his eyes, her hand playing gently with his hair, just silent and utterly content—they two together and alone in a world all their own: silence around them, a stillness so utter and complete that they must needs pause to listen to its voiceless music.

"Art thou content, beloved?" he sometimes asked, feeling for the hand which was so readily accorded to his keeping.

"I think I have never known happiness till now," would be the substance of her answer. "Oh, Leon, Leon, Leon—husband mine."

Her husband at last ! Given back to her from the furnace. Gold tried in the fire. A nature purified, purged, uplifted. Was ever woman so blessed as she ? —so utterly, so entirely, so triumphantly content ?

They wandered whither their fancy led them. He showed her things strange and wonderful and beautiful. They learnt something of desert law and desert wonders from the Arabs, with whom Leon could converse with a pleasant facility. They watched the wonders of dawn and sunset over the trackless desert wastes. They grew into each other with that holy intimacy and oneness which is the crown and seal of highest human love. Diana's beauty seemed to glow with a more vivid splendour with the passage of each golden day, and from his eyes the strained look faded slowly which had grown more marked through each long year of warfare ; and though these were still sunk somewhat deeply in their sockets, they had become before the journey ended as pools of silent peace.

Their last stage, as their first had been, was Algiers. And the boat they were to return home in was a few days late in calling. Shipping was becoming more normal now, but there was still lack of certainty as to when any individual vessel would arrive, and it was only a few of these that took the island of St. Cecilia as a port of call.

Leon, however, had many friends in the gay French town ; and now that they had had their beautiful honeymoon of solitude, Diana suffered herself gladly to be introduced to these friendly persons, who made much of the attractive young couple, invited them to their houses, and did all that was possible to enliven their short stay. They congratulated Leon on the charm and intelligence of his bride, her upon the gallantry and distinction of her soldier-husband. There was not so very much in Algiers to show them when they had been the round of the Arab town and the fine French buildings ; but there came a day when one said to Leon—

"Let me take you and Madame to our hospital. We have some wounded soldiers there. For them it would be a great delight to speak with one who has seen what you have done and can tell of it so graphically. Whilst the sight of Madame's so gracious and beautiful face will indeed put life and happiness into the saddest heart."

Diana returned the speaker's bow with a frank friendliness which had already won her golden opinions. She was more than ready—eager—to carry out the proposed visit to the Hôtel Dieu.

The war victims were most of them assembled in one ward, and of these many were convalescent. It was, as their guide told them, an immense pleasure to talk with Leon and hear details of the last triumphant episodes of war. And whilst he talked, Diana walked over to the men in the beds, smiling at them and distributing flowers and cigarettes.

In one corner of the ward a screen had been set up, indicating, she supposed, a bad case. But perhaps even so sick a man would like a flower left upon his pillow.

Softly she stepped within the shelter, and gazed upon a recumbent figure, extremely tall, emaciated almost beyond what seemed possible to humanity, the white face with parchment-like skin clean-shaved and smooth, looking rather like the face of a corpse than that of a living man. It was as though he lay sunk in a deep trance, from which perhaps he might never waken.

At first Diana looked merely with wonder and sympathetic curiosity. She glanced to see what name had been inscribed upon the card over the bed; but the name-space was blank. Then as she gazed a strange sense as of familiarity stole over her, and her own colour began to fade. When her husband came in search of her some minutes later, she was as white as the man extended on the bed.

"Diana, what is it? What do you see?"

She extended her hand. Her voice shook. It was scarcely more than a whisper.

"Leon—look, look. I am sure of it. I am sure. The man lying before us is Marcus Heristal—Lenore's husband."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE WANDERER

"DIANA! What are you saying? What did you say? Marcus Heristal!"

"Yes. Leon—it is he! Marcus Heristal—Lenore's husband!"

"But you have never seen him. How can you tell?"

"Oh, that—I can easily explain. In her room Lenore has a big photograph of her husband. I have studied the face again and again. More than that, she had a crayon head of him which she had drawn herself. She was not satisfied with it. She decided to make a copy and try and get it more to her liking. That was one winter when I stayed with her for a few weeks. I said I would make a copy too. Funnily enough she liked mine better than her own. I used the photograph to correct the lines of the features by. She tried to work up hers more from memory. Do you think I could ever be mistaken in so marked a fact? That is Marcus—Lord Heristal."

She spoke with a certain urgency, though in low tones. Her clear voice seemed to penetrate the mists surrounding the patient on the bed. For a moment his closed eyelids fluttered, as though he were seeking to lift them.

The surgeon, who had entered the ward just as Diana was speaking, and had his eyes fixed upon his patient's face, now spoke.

"Would Madame repeat once more that name, the lady's name, which she spoke just now? It seems to me to be a name that the sick monsieur himself has sometimes sought to speak. Let him hear it spoken now—clearly, softly, in Madame's beautiful voice."

Diana approached a little nearer to the bed, bent over it and said softly—

"Lenore, Lenore. I come to you from Lenore."

There was no mistaking now that the eyelids flickered. The wax-like hand upon the coverlet stirred also. It seemed as though some effort were being made; and all watched with breathless intentness.

Suddenly dark eyes opened for a few brief moments, and a hoarse whisper passed the man's lips.

"Lenore," came the echo, and again, "Lenore."

Then the eyes closed as fast as before, and the trance-like condition seemed to deepen. There was scarcely any movement of the deep chest to show that he drew breath.

Diana stopped and took the left hand in hers, turning it a little, so that the attenuated wrist could be seen. The skin had been deeply bronzed once, but the tan had greatly faded now. And there, in a row, were several small white marks, obviously some scar of far-back origin.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, pointing to those scars, "that settles it!"

"What?—did you expect to find those scars?" asked the surgeon. "Is it possible that Madame knows this wanderer of the desert, who was at last brought here to us?"

"I know his wife. I was telling how I was able to recognize him. And once she told me of the adventure with a young wolf which had left scars upon his left wrist."

"But this is of the most interesting!" spoke the little surgeon with the eager eyes. "Would Madame come with me into a private room? We have had this

case a month in our care. He came to us almost a dying man; but his constitution is of the most marvellous. His body responds to our care. Certainly the body recovers. But he lies as Madame sees, sunk in the lethargy of weakness and fever—though the active symptoms are subdued—and as I judge (a symptom most difficult to combat) the desire of life seems to be absent. Yet if he has a wife—and that wife is the friend of Madame . . .”

Plainly the good little Frenchman was afraid of trenching upon delicate ground. But Diana was too eager to read between the lines.

“He has been away so long, so long! We have all of us given him up for dead—all but his wife! She has still not surrendered hope! Oh, it is wonderful! It is beautiful! Long, long ago they told her from England that he was dead. But never has she quite believed it! And she is right—she is right!”

The two men exchanged glances, and Leon said in rapid undertone—

“It might well be that he is wondering as to his wife. He must know himself given up as dead. And she is young and very beautiful. The thought might easily come—the doubt—the fear. . . .”

The surgeon smote his hand upon his thigh. He beamed through his spectacles.

“Monsieur le Colonel has without doubt hit the truth! He has known himself accounted a dead man. And what of the beautiful wife, whom the world regards as a widow? In truth strange things have happened in that long war! Could he have had any news of her which might cause him doubt?”

“He can have heard nothing from her for very, very long. He vanished in the mirage of Mesopotamia. Nothing save contradictory rumours have reached us since. Tell me, how and when did he come here? Was he brought by others? Or was he making for this goal himself? Has he no account to give of himself?”

"None. He was past that. Arabs brought him in, friendly Arabs, who had been down far into the south, as far as our French rule extends. It was in one of the desert cities of the south that they met with other Arabs, who had him in their care. So far as I can tell you, he has been passed on from tribe to tribe in a very strange way. You doubtless know that there are certain travellers—I believe most of such are Englishmen—who have some strange powers in these mysterious lands of Africa. Look at that ring upon his hand. It bears certain strange characters traced upon it. I hold that in some past adventures of his younger life he may have served a desert ruler, and have had that talisman bestowed upon him. If so, his life would everywhere be safe. You cannot explain these things. But if you live long on the fringe of the desert, you know them."

Leon looked struck.

"I know that a perilous service was asked of him, and that he undertook it willingly and with confidence. He was known to have travelled before in eastern lands, and to understand the ways and the speech of desert people."

"Ah!—there you have it! They sent him because they knew that he might carry out a mission where others failed."

"Well, he did not succeed in the mission. For he disappeared and was no more heard of."

"Ah, this war! That would account for much. A hostile country—those villains of Turks! But they could not kill him. It was not suffered. There were those who watched over him and rescued him! No, no, I know nothing; I do but guess, piecing together the fragments of information those rogues of Arabs gave to us. They knew little; but were resolved to bring their charge here to the coast, to give him up into our hands. When they knew him safe with us, they vanished. Melted away into the desert. We saw them no more."

"And they left Lord Heristal with you—more dead than alive?"

"And more Arab than Englishman. So that at the first we knew not of what nationality he was. He was bearded to the eyes, his skin was burnt almost black, he was parched with fever and seemed barely conscious. Hair and beard were so matted that we had to shave him. And having done that, we saw that he was European and guessed that he was English. But no account can he give of himself. He must have been through immense hardships. You see his iron frame. Yet that has only just sufficed to pull him through. He has probably been in captivity many times—not necessarily harsh or cruel captivity, but one which must have sadly galled his spirit. He may have been taken away into strange places for safety. It is idle to guess what may have happened to him before he came here. And for five weeks we have been seeking to bring him back to life and health. And he has slept and slept and slept, as a man sleeps who has suffered the last extremity of exhaustion. Sleep has been more to him than medicine; though these last ten days he has begun to take food better than at first. The fever is quite gone, and we were looking to the time when he might be able to give some account of himself. But Madame has now recognized him! That is a wonderful thing! And doubtless we shall hear what the next step is to be."

"Would you consent to his being carried on board the steamer for which Madame and I are waiting, which in some six-and-thirty hours will bring us to the island of St. Cecilia, where his wife has a beautiful home in which to receive him?"

The good little man's eyes brightened with pleasure.

"But of a certainty! What indeed could be better? He can be carried on board. And the ships for St. Cecilia are never full. We will so dispose him that he shall breathe the good air off the sea. The gentle motion will lull him to renewed restfulness. Indeed he may

never know that he has been removed ; for the lethargy is very deep. And there, at the voyage's end, is the good home and the lovely lady awaiting him ! What could there be of better for him ? And M'sier le Colonel with Madame his wife for his companions ! Why the stars in their courses must surely be fighting for him ! ”

Husband and wife left the Hôtel Dieu with a great thankfulness in their hearts.

“ Leon—Oh, Leon—do you not understand ! Oh, poor Lord Heristal ! How he must have suffered ! ”

“ How do you mean ? ”

“ In mind, Leon, not knowing what has been passing in Lenore's life. Oh, Leon, she has told me things sometimes, Lenore has told me. She had a letter from Marcus once—before he went away into special peril. I never saw it. It was no doubt too sacred. But I know just a little what he said. For we used to talk together, and it came out. She wanted me to understand how noble he was. Oh, Leon—suppose she had been tempted.”

“ Can you tell me what it was he said . . . without betraying sacred confidence ? ”

“ I think so ; not that I know much. But it seemed so sad that Lenore should always be alone. And then she told me that it was not his wish for her to live unwedded if he never came back to her. He put her happiness first. He said things that would have made many women decide upon a different course. But Lenore could not. And I think she has never quite given up hope. Oh, Leon, Leon—suppose she had ! ”

“ Yes—and do you not understand how it must have been with him, unable to get back, not knowing what was transpiring with us, but sure only of one thing—his own reputed death ? Perhaps he meant to remain a desert wanderer. Perhaps he never meant to return. But in the end he had no choice. And now we are here to take him home ! ”

“ Oh, Leon, Leon—how wonderful ! ”

"Wonderful indeed, but we must think carefully what to do when we arrive at the island."

"Shall we not take him straight up to Lenore?"

"I think not. Let us take him home first with us, Diana—to that portion of our house which Maman is making beautiful for you. I would have your father see him first of all, since he will not know where he is. He will not know that Lenore is near. If he opens his eyes to consciousness, he will not recognize one of the faces he will see about him."

"And you think that will be best, Leon?"

"I think we must not take upon ourselves a greater responsibility. Your father will take the case in hand. As soon as he thinks fit Lenore shall be told. But until he himself gives consent to the experiment, I think we should not risk that great moment of bringing the two together. We will take him home with us at the first."

Diana's eyes kindled.

"Oh, Leon—oh, Leon; what a beautiful home-coming for us—to bring her husband back to Lenore!"

Leon looked gravely before him, his face full of silent emotion. Diana pressed his arm in sudden sympathy.

"Ah!—I know what you are thinking! Lucien!"

Then he turned upon her the light of his kindling eyes.

"I am thinking of Lucien! How should I not? But I know that none will more truly wish her joy—will even joy himself—than my brother Lucien!"

"Ah, Leon!—how true that is! How well you know him. But must his life then be always led alone?"

"Outwardly so, perhaps. Yet I think that in his soul and spirit there will be no room for desolating loneliness. Both will be so filled with lovely thoughts, with the heavenly music which springs up within him, that he will be always filled with gentle happiness and joy. There will also be Maman for him to love and

cherish. How those two love one another ! I could have chosen differently for him ; but I feel that he will be content. We shall always have one home there with him, Diana, wherever our future lot may be cast. And I think that in our children, should it please the good God to give us them, he will find great solace and delight. I would that he might have been a father himself. Yet if that may not be, I know that he will feel some of the joys of fatherhood in the little ones who may one day crowd about him and love him—our children, Diana, ours and Lenore's."

She could not answer, for her eyes were full of tears ; but she pressed his arm again and her spirit was comforted.

Upon a very golden spring morning, with a sky all saffron and primrose light, and a sea like a pavement of sapphire, the little vessel crept softly to its anchorage in St. Cecilia's smooth bay, and Diana's keen gaze soon detected amongst those in the boats awaiting the signal to approach, her own father and Lucien de Québriac.

Their patient had borne the voyage well, lying quiet and tranquil in his berth. He took the food that was brought to him. The ship's doctor visited him several times a day, being interested in the story of the case which had been given him by his confrère of Algiers. But no change in his condition had taken place.

"The pulse is better," they were told, "and the weakness yields in some measure. With little doubt he will now begin to gain ground rapidly. And nowhere could he be better placed than in such a fair island. After the heats of the desert it would not do to take him too directly to England. He should spend the summer, and perhaps the following winter in a softly equable climate. Then without doubt he will be a sound man once more. He has a constitution of the finest ! A veritable son of Anak. These English, they go through so much. But Madame need have no fear.

He will make a recovery of the finest ! Doubt not of that ! ”

Diana met her father at the head of the companion, and was folded in his arms. Leon waited till his brother with slower movements could reach him.

“ Come, Daddy,” spoke Diana, and led her father to the cabin, where, dressed and ready, but still with closed eyes and with little seeming consciousness of his surroundings, Marcus Heristal lay.

“ We have a patient for you, Daddy,” she said.

He looked at the recumbent figure. He looked at his daughter’s flushed and sparkling face. Then he passed his hands several times over the head of Marcus.

“ Who is it ? ” he asked.

“ An Englishman—out of the desert. Daddy, Daddy—can you not guess ? Oh, it is almost too wonderful to be believed. It is Lord Heristal himself ! ”

Dr. Rodin stared at Diana, looked again at Marcus, and again, as she told him rapidly all the tale, continued his examination of the man’s cranium with those wonderfully sensitive fingers of his.

“ What are you going to do with him ? Take him to his wife ? ”

“ Leon said, take him home first with us, for you to examine. And only to bring Lenore to him when you approved ! ”

Dr. Rodin nodded his head many times.

“ The boy is right ! What wisdom in this new son of mine ! Take him back with you, my children. Let no word reach his wife as yet. Leave him first to me. . . . ”

“ Daddy, Daddy ! Oh, my wonderful Daddy ! Are you going to cure him ? ”

“ Of course I am going to cure him,” came the confident answer. “ Do you think I am going to hand him over to his wife like that ? I will say as the English do in their so pertinent idiom—No fear ! ”

CHAPTER XXVIII

A SLOW AWAKENING

"LET him be taken to my room," spoke Lucien. "My Arab servant shall care for him there. No one will disturb him, and he will have everything possible to minister to his comfort. Do I not know—I who spent so many semi-helpless years there? And how I came to love the place."

"That will be splendid," said Diana; "for Lenore will certainly come to our rooms that I know Maman has made charming for us! She will want to see everything there. And yet she is not to know our great, wonderful, beautiful secret until my father—my wizard father—gives the word!"

Leon and Lucien both made gestures of assent. Dr. Rodin was superintending the removal of his new patient. His face was intent. He wore the air of a man who sees at once a struggle and a victory before him. But there was a light in his eyes which his daughter fully understood. Her own face caught its reflection.

"He is going to cure him! He is going to make him well for Lenore! Oh, to have such power! Is it not a gift—an endowment—which seems to come from God Himself?" She went straight up to Lucien, as Leon joined the group around the unknown sick man. "Tell me, my brother, it is not going to hurt too much!"

He looked at her and there was what she could only term a glory in his eyes.

"It is not going to hurt me at all. How should it hurt? The being I love best in the world (for thou hast divined this, sister mine) is to be made happy, is to realize the desire of her heart—the objective of her prayers. Dost thou not understand? In her joy I shall find my healing and my happiness."

"Lucien," spoke Diana in a voice which shook a little, "thou art of a surety—a saint!"

He smiled, shaking his head gently; but he held her hand in his own with a soft pressure. His eyes were singularly sweet in expression.

"And I have other causes of happiness besides. My brother's great joy is also mine. We have been dreaming many dreams, my mother and I, about our future in our home of dreams. We think the time has come to awake from these dreams. But that will only mean that we shall take our part in energies from which we have hitherto been shut out. Let me tell you in advance, Diana, of what is likely to come to Leon. They are going to appoint him Military Governor of the island. Old General De Chazelet is retiring. He goes back to France. With the close of the war there is much to be done in the matter of reconstruction, and France must safeguard herself as she neglected to do in the past. And Leon's services merit recognition. It is not a great post; but he will do the work well. He will become a power here, and help the development of our island's resources. So we shall not lose him—or lose you, Diana. You will have an official residence; but also your quarters with us. It has greatly pleased Maman to make these ready for your home-coming. You will see!"

Ah! but how good it was to be at home! Leon and his bride went on in advance. The Marquise met them on the threshold and folded them to her heart.

"My son—my daughter! My children—come home to me again!"

"Maman!—Maman!"

"Come and see your home, my dear ones. It awaits you with its dumb expectation! I verily believe it holds its own welcome for the dear ones now returned."

"Maman, thou art so gracious, so tender, so infinitely dear! Thou wouldst make a home in the heart of the desert by thy goodness!"

There had long been a closed wing in the *Maison des Songes*. The house was too large for the small party it had held of late years.

But now this wing was thrown open to the light and sun. Its large beautiful rooms had been adorned with flowers. The hand of the Marquise was everywhere visible in the arrangement and adjustment of the costly and beautiful plenishings which had heretofore stood shrouded from sight behind shuttered windows. Leon exclaimed with astonishment. He had not realized before how beautiful the place was. Diana gazed about her with eyes of entrancement, and passed from room to room upon both floors, her hand locked in that of her husband's mother, whom she felt indeed to be her own.

"But Maman, it is too beautiful for us. Thou dost do and give too much!"

"Nothing can be too much or too good for my son who offered his life for his country, and the wife he has brought me to be the daughter of my old age." She folded Diana in her arms and softly whispered: "Give him children, my child, my daughter, and my old heart will not know an ungratified wish!"

On the other side of the house in its corresponding wing Lucien's rooms lay, whilst the Marquise had her quarters in the main block, where were also the great reception rooms, many of which were but seldom used.

After Lucien's accident in his young manhood, he had chiefly used one great room upon the ground-floor, which opened by six long windows on to two wide terraces. This had been transformed into a bedroom and work-room combined, and here years of his life had been passed. There was a great piano upon the parquetry floor, book-cases occupied the wall spaces between the windows. The bed by day was draped with Oriental brocade, transforming it into a divan, and the adjoining marble-paved bathroom contained all the requisites of a dressing-room. There was a padded couch on large castors which could

be wheeled to any part of the room or out upon either of the terraces. It was a place where an invalid or crippled man could lose a sense of his disabilities and almost forget them. Lucien had quite forgotten his. And into this peaceful place where so many quiet contented years had been spent, he brought the husband of Lenore Heristal.

No one in the house, save only the Marquise, knew who he was. Lucien had for long years kept about him an Arab servant from Algeria, who had attached himself to his young master with the fidelity that in the eastern races is often so marked. He was a very silent and discreet person, and fully able to take charge of Dr. Rodin's patient from the boat. It was no great astonishment to anyone that a refugee from the desert should be given asylum here. Doors were everywhere opened—and had been opened for years—to waifs and strays from the world-wide strife. It was surmised that it was an Englishman who had found an asylum with the hospitable De Québriacs, and was under treatment from Dr. Rodin. That excited no wonder; and in the interest of Leon's return with his young wife, and in the congratulations poured upon him on many counts—that of his new appointment not the least of these—the matter of the stranger within their gates was quickly forgotten.

Marcus Heristal lay very still and quiet upon the narrow bed where they had laid him. It was impossible to know whether he realized what had happened to him, whether he had been aware that he had taken a voyage, and was now in surroundings quite new and strange to him. Now and then he opened his eyes; this generally when Dr. Rodin bent over him, and passed his fingers about his head, upon which the hair was now beginning to grow once again, though still almost shorter than military usage warranted.

And again when Lucien sat at the piano, and drew from its strings low, soft, haunting strains, he would slightly turn his head as though the better to hear; and

now and then his eyes would open for a few moments at a time, and fix themselves upon the player.

Lucien used his room by day almost as he had done before, sleeping in one adjoining, yet often visiting the patient through the quiet hours of the night.

It seemed to him little by little as though Marcus began to watch for his coming, to be conscious of his presence. He often sat beside him and talked very quietly of many things. He told him succinctly and in brief of the course and conclusion of the war. He talked to him as though he were understood, though by no means sure as to this, and Dr. Rodin approved of this quiet attempt to arouse the sleeping mind.

"There has been brain pressure," he said, "and at the first I thought I might decide to use surgical means of alleviation. Now I doubt whether this will be necessary. The electric massage and treatment I am trying first promise good, if gradual, results. And I note that your music helps him, Lucien. Play to him much, play to him often. Sing to him also, and let Diana come and sing too. The nerves of the brain are torpid. What has happened to him through these years of his disappearance we may never know. But his physical frame is making marked progress, whilst the brain is slowly following. And you are doing him great good. Your quietness soothes him ; your music has become a solace. I think that he hears more of your words than seems to be the case. If he tries to speak with you, help him out all you can. Probably before long this will happen. Keep him, as far as possible, from agitation. But help him to feel his way back towards his place in the world."

"And when is his wife to know he is here ? "

"As soon as ever I judge that the time has come when her appearance beside him will be for his good. At this moment I cannot tell when this will be ; yet I am sure that a day will come when to bring Lady Heristal to her husband's side will put the finishing touch to his recovery. I am waiting for that."

"Do you think he knows who he is? Or has he lost touch with his identity?"

"That I cannot tell. Probably he has lost touch with it; but equally probably it may be coming slowly back. That is a point you may be able to determine if ever he should speak with you. It would be interesting to know."

"Am I to help him back to knowledge of himself if he begins to grope his way?"

Dr. Rodin seemed to reflect.

"I think I must leave that point to your own discretion. Unless I am on the spot, you will have to settle how you speak or answer should he at any time (as begins to be possible and even probable now) ask you a question or make statements which you will have to answer. But I have no fear, Lucien. You will act wisely and prudently I know. And I trace in him a certain unconscious dependence upon you, which shows that something in your personality has got a grip upon him. This is a most excellent thing. It is giving him back to human life. When once that happens, his wife will help him still more. But I would not willingly bring them together till his recovery has reached a stage when it will not be pain to her to see him. For the moment you are his best friend."

Lucien felt this himself—felt it with a strange intensity of satisfaction, in which was curiously blended pleasure and pain. In helping back this man to health and restoration of mind he was paving the way to Lenore's happiness. What more could he ask of life?

Quietly stealing to the side of the bed in the early hours of a lovely spring morning, Lucien found Marcus lying for the first time with wide-open eyes, and in those eyes a look of quiet contemplation such as had never been visible there as yet.

He took his accustomed seat beside the bed, and lifted the cup from the table to offer his patient a drink. And now for the first time a hand was stretched out. The thin fingers took the cup from him. The head was

slightly lifted, and Marcus drank and gave back the cup, his eyes scanning the face bent over him.

"Thank you," he said in a low voice, and after a few minutes, still watching Lucien intently as he sat beside the bed and just straightened the covering there, he added a half-expected question :

"Would you tell me where I am, and who you are ? The face seems familiar, yet I cannot put a name to it. But surely I have seen you often ! "

"Yes, very often. You are a guest in my house. A war guest, you understand. You were brought here to recover, and I think you are now doing this. I am very glad. Will you tell me your name ? "

For a very short time there was silence between them. Lucien gently added :

"But not if you would rather keep it to yourself. You are my guest. If you desire to remain unknown I accept your ruling. I ask nothing of you."

The hollow eyes dwelt upon the quiet face. That some struggle of the soul was passing within, Lucien very well knew. But he held his peace. He would not intermeddle with the matters concerning the soul of another. Presently Marcus spoke again, slowly, dreamily :

"I think that I may truly call myself a dead man," he said—"to the world I am dead. For the moment I cannot tell whether I do well ever to live again. I thought that the desert which swallowed me up would hold me prisoner to the end. I am not sure that I shall not presently return to it. I do not know how I came here."

He closed his eyes as though weary. Lucien left him quiet for awhile, and then as quietly told him a few facts concerning his journey from south to north, and how at the last he had fallen into kindly French hands, and had been cared for in the speaker's own house when able to be moved there. "It has been the right and privilege of those who have not themselves faced the horrors and the perils of war, to offer asylum to such as, having

done this, are in need of shelter and tendance. That, my privilege, I have claimed in your case, my friend, and a privilege I account it."

The man lay very still with closed eyes. Lucien could not tell whether he might be thinking or whether the mists had shut him in again. Then the eyes opened.

"It is better sometimes to be dead than living," he said.

"That may be. But over such a matter we have no choice. You offered your life. But it remains whole within you. Take it, then, and make the most of it."

"You do not understand," the level voice said quietly; "I am thinking not of myself but of others. For the sake of those others (did I but know all) I might know that it was best for me to remain as one dead. My return to life might bring . . . what I dare not think of. I came out from the desert, where I thought to meet my end. I think it may be best for—them—that I go back to it again."

Then Lucien understood, and his heart swelled within him. Marcus Heristal was calmly contemplating renouncing all which had meant life for him in the past—wealth, possessions, title, identity; was prepared to lose himself in what would be nothing less than a living death, for the sake of the woman, his wife, whom he passionately loved, yet whom he knew (judging him dead) might have formed other ties that would make his sudden return to her an awful, an unspeakable horror and woe! Ah, how well he understood! And at that moment he could almost have knelt at the feet of the man who was speaking of this immense, this overwhelming sacrifice, speaking calmly and with a deep pain in his eyes, yet with voice and tongue that did not falter.

And suppose that Lenore had listened to him—Lucien—in those days when he had longed to bring her comfort and healing! Ah, how true is a woman's faithful heart! Why ever seek to change its rulings? He was glad he had not tried.

He laid his hand upon that of the man before him. In his face there was an expression which riveted the gaze of Marcus. It seemed so full of lambent light.

"Why do you look at me thus?" he asked.

"Because I would ask of you to be in no haste to decide so strange a point. Rest here in this house of mine, an honoured guest, for yet awhile longer. And when strength returns to you, you will better face so grave a decision. But now you have talked enough. Sleep again and rest. And before you act take counsel with Dr. Rodin. A wiser man than he you will not find."

Marcus's eyes sought Lucien's face before they closed again.

"I feel that in you I have my best friend and counsellor," he said—"although as yet I do not know the name of my benefactor."

"You shall know it one day," Lucien answered. "Sleep now and rest."

When Dr. Rodin came and heard Lucien's tale, and his interpretation thereof; when he had visited his patient and had received rational answers to his questions, he returned to the young Marquis, who awaited his coming with impatience, and said:

"It marches, it marches! And now the time has come. I go to the house upon the hill, and I bring back with me Lord Heristal's wife!"

CHAPTER XXIX

HUSBAND AND WIFE

BUT Dr. Rodin did not have to visit the Maison de la Miséricorde in order to find Lenore. For when he reached his daughter's apartments with the glad news

concerning her husband, it was to hear that she was expected here within an hour; and this pleased the little doctor, who desired that the meeting should be brought about in the most natural way possible.

"But will you not prepare her? Surely you will tell her, before taking her to Lucien's room, whom it is she is there to find!"

"I think not. I think not. She had better not be in any wise agitated beforehand. Let it all come about as naturally as possible. She knows that Lucien entertains a guest. She asks after him and his progress. She knows that he has not been able to give account of himself. When told that he is better, and asked to pay him a visit, it will seem a natural thing to her enough. Let her go in to him without warning. Let them meet face to face. So it will be best. She need not be warned. She is strong and sound; and joy hurts none. As for him, better that he sees her coming to him without time for thinking how they will meet. I know what he has been dreaming and picturing all this while. It is for her to disperse the mists."

"Daddy, it is simply frightfully exciting! Lenore and her husband—together!"

Leon came in upon them, his face alight.

"Diana—have you heard? Ah! Here is our father come to tell you! Lucien says he has come fully to himself at last, knows who he is, begins to remember all his past. What is now to be done?"

"When Lenore comes to-day, Leon, Daddy is going to take her—to him."

"But—how splendid! To-day! And what then will happen?"

The men looked at one another in doubt. Diana answered the question.

"Why then she will take him home with her, of course! Daddy, you will not interfere, will you? You will let him go?"

"But certainly. It will not hurt him. Yes, you are

right, my child. Lady Heristal will without doubt take her husband home."

Diana clasped her hands ; her eyes were shining.

"How simply beautiful and glorious—for every one—except Lucien !"

Without her having seen his approach Lucien was amongst them. He went straight up to Diana and stood before her. In his eyes there shone the light which had puzzled Marcus a little while before.

"You need not make an exception of me, *ma sœur*. I too have my share in this revelation of beauty and glory? Dost think I would have it otherwise?"

"Oh, Lucien, Lucien—thou art so good—so great!"

"Neither good nor great, but to-day a truly happy man. For think what this day might have been to all, had I realized a dream which I cherished for long."

That contingency scarcely bore thinking of. But they understood all it meant to him. Diana laid her hands upon his shoulders. Her husband's brother was only second to Leon himself in her warm heart.

"And thou wilt be able truly to rejoice, dear Lucien?"

"Truly and with all my heart," he answered with what she had come to call his "Galahad" expression of countenance. And she knew that for him there was an inner vision of grace and glory which human loss or frustration could never dim. He had lived in a world of his own in the past, with his mother for his confidante and friend. He would have that world left him, beautiful and unsullied, and outside that magic circle of the inner life so much that was gracious and tender and sweet.

She raised herself on tiptoe and kissed his brow.

"Truly thou art a saint," she told him, "and all of us will be the better and happier for thy presence so near us."

None of them were surprised to hear from out the music-room the strains of some glorious, triumphant and lofty choral arise, uplifting hearts and sending thoughts flying heavenwards. When Diana looked in upon Lucien's

patient, she saw by his expression that he was intently listening. She saw a light upon his face which had never been there before. She smiled at him and waved her hand. And then she went forth into the glad spring sunshine to await the coming of Lenore.

It was a heavenly day! The throb of reviving nature was in the air. The blue skies seemed flecked with gold; the hills behind sparkled and shone; the dew-washed gardens were full of intoxicating scents. Orange blossom decked the trees, contrasting with the deep gold of the fruit now coming to its perfection. The breath of the flowers was wafted hither and thither upon the breeze. Diana inhaled it with a sense of rapture.

"Orange blossom for bridals," she whispered to herself, "Oh, Lenore, Lenore—surely this will be in very truth your bridal day!"

The sound of a deep joyous bark broke upon her ears. Odin was careering down the avenue towards her. Generally he was the advance guard on Lenore's visits. Her white slenderness could be seen at the end of the vista. She moved with her graceful lightness of foot to meet Diana. The springtide had come, and she wore her virginal whiteness.

"You beautiful, beautiful creature!" spoke Diana to herself as she sped forward to meet and greet her.

They wandered together a little in the garden. They paused to listen to Lucien's music as it rolled forth into the sunny glory of the day.

"It is like some great pealing hymn of thanksgiving and rejoicing," spoke Lenore. "How wonderful he is! I think there is nobody quite like him."

"And I am sure there is not," she answered quickly; "Lucien stands alone upon a pinnacle all his own. A little lonely, perhaps; but he has compensations."

"I am sure of it," Lenore answered earnestly, "and ah, what a friend he is!"

Presently Dr. Rodin approached them. Diana felt as though Lenore must hear the pounding of her heart.

But her father's manner was admirably normal and like itself as he greeted the guest.

Then to his daughter, as though she would be the more interested, he said :

"Our patient yonder shows marked improvement to-day. It has been long in coming. But there is a considerable advance visible this morning."

"I am so glad, Daddy," spoke Diana as gaily as she could. "How soon are you going to let me pay him a visit? I regard him rather as my protégé, since it was partly my doing that we brought him here."

"Exactly, my dear. Well, I see no reason why you two ladies should not walk in at one of his open windows and wish him Good day. Just see how he takes it; and if he seems disposed to talk a little, humour him. There are some sights which should suffice to make a sick man sound!" And he bowed to the two young feminine creatures with his French bonhomie of deportment.

"Dear, how polite he is!" laughed Diana, whose face was flushed, whose eyes were radiant. "Say, shall we go and visit him, Lenore?"

"Willingly, if Dr. Rodin thinks the visit will be welcome. But had you not better go alone, Diana, at the first? Two guests may be too much for him!"

"Ah, no! Come with me. I am shy!" she laughed, "and you have such a gift with the sick! You should hear how the *éclopés* speak of you!"

"Ah, my dear *éclopés*! That is another matter! But I will very willingly go with Diana. Does your patient yet know who he is, Dr. Rodin?"

"He has not said, nor have I asked him. I avoid questions in such cases as long as possible. But I should surmise that he begins to remember. Perhaps he will tell you himself."

"How exciting!" cried Diana with sparkling eyes. "Come, Lenore—let us go."

She led the way of set purpose, afraid lest Lenore might see her face. She felt so near to self-betrayal.

But Lenore was absolutely without suspicion. She followed quietly, speaking with the doctor, whose self-control was proof against any visible excitement. He just dropped a few words about his patient in quiet, casual fashion.

Diana led the way round the angle of the house, stepping upon an arcaded terrace which Lenore knew as belonging to Lucien's private rooms, though she had seldom done more than pace here occasionally with the Marquise.

Long windows opened upon it, and beside one of these Diana paused, holding out a hand to Lenore.

"Shall we come in?" she said, and her voice held a curious throb.

As she stepped across the threshold Lenore became conscious of something tense in the atmosphere. From a distance came the roll of Lucien's music. The room seemed dim after the golden glow outside, and for a few moments she did not see well.

Then she was aware of a movement in the shadows. She stepped forward to see a recumbent figure raised suddenly erect upon a narrow bed. Her visions cleared. She stopped short; and then with a little low cry she glided forward.

"Marcus—Marcus—my Marcus!"

"Lenore! Lenore!"

He fell back upon his pillows. His eyes closed. She was on her knees beside him; but Dr. Rodin was also there, making a sign to his daughter which she instantly understood. She brought him the cordial which stood at hand; but it was Lenore who took it from her hand, and put her arm behind her husband's head.

"Marcus, Marcus!" she softly said with a throb of urgency in her tones. Slowly his eyes opened and fixed upon her face. "Drink," she said, "drink!" And he did her bidding like a man in a dream.

It was also as though she dreamed, as she leaned above him, feasting her eyes upon those worn features. These

seemed beneath her ardent gaze to glow with a suffused light, that drove back the deathlike pallor of his face, and restored to him in some wonderful way the vitality of his one-time manhood.

"Lenore," he breathed, "Lenore!"

She saw that she must go very gently with him. She yearned to clasp him in her arms, to feel his arms about her. But she refrained, and Dr. Rodin confirmed and approved her quietude by a nod, as he led his daughter away. Still as though she dreamed, Lenore took a seat beside the bed, holding his long attenuated hand between her own.

"Marcus—Marcus—husband!" she softly breathed.

"Lenore, Lenore—what is it? Where am I?"

"With me, dearest. In the house of my friends."

"What friends?"

"The dear De Québriacs—those friends of whom I so often wrote to you. You remember how I told you of them—the Marquise and her sons."

His eyes seemed to dilate as he sought to follow her words. But that he understood, his next ones showed.

"Wait," he said, "wait whilst I think. The Marquis de Québriac—the man who makes music."

"Yes, yes, Marcus—listen, and you can hear him now! He makes beautiful, glorious music! He is doing so to-day. Listen!"

In the silence which followed her words the strains of the great triumphal choral floated to them on the wings of some scented breeze. The deep dark eyes of Marcus Heristal fixed themselves with an unutterable yearning on the face of his wife.

"Lenore," he whispered, "do I find you here—in the house of the man who makes the music? In the house of the De Québriacs?"

Her heart was too full of the joy and mystery and wonder of his return to take in the strange misgiving which had assailed him at this moment, though she caught

the look of pain and strain upon the face so unspeakably dear to her.

Ah, how dear it was! It seemed at this moment as though all the pent-up tenderness and yearning and love of these long five weary years rushed like a flood upon her heart. She was almost paralysed by the power of it all, the wonder, the glory. Her husband given back to her as from the dead. Her Marcus—come to her as though he stepped forth from some desert grave.

But his eyes seemed to demand an answer, and it was very gently given.

"Yes, in the house of the De Québriacs—my friends and your preservers. They found you in Algiers. Leon's wife must have recognized you from my picture. They brought you back with them. Here you have been nursed to health and the knowledge of yourself. And now they bring me to your side. . . ."

"Have I spoken my name, then? I did not mean to do so?"

"Not mean to do so. Husband—why not?"

His eyes seemed to cling to her face, as though he would read the very thoughts of her soul. She held his hand fast between hers as she returned his gaze.

"Lenore, Lenore—do you not—just a little—understand?"

"Dear Marcus, I cannot understand at all. Should you be speaking so much? Does it matter? You are here—with me. Cannot everything else go?"

He seemed to struggle with himself. He pressed a hand upon his eyes.

"Lenore, your eyes—they bring back all that happy past! But, O child—my little love—how can I know what is best for you? When I heard of that beautiful music—and the man who made it! And when I saw my own youth going from me through those awful years of warfare—when I pictured you in your loveliness—scarcely more than a child—with all your golden life yet before you . . ."

He came to pause, his weakness made continuous speech difficult ; but Lenore was beginning to understand. A lovely light dawned in her eyes, and with it a yearning unspeakable. But still the sensation of moving in a dream held her very calm.

" Marcus, my husband " (she loved to use that word), " was that why you wrote me that letter—before you went out to your mission in the East ? "

" They told me it would be a mission of extreme danger. I saw that they doubted whether I should ever return. That seemed a small thing in those days. All were living out in the same doubt. Only this thing was more remote—more charged with varied perils. It seemed to fit my case."

" Your case, Marcus, my husband. You mean to say that you began to think your wife would benefit by your death."

" It would at least give you back your freedom."

" Did you think I wanted back my freedom ? "

" There was that musician—so young, so handsome, so much your friend. And they were talking of it—those who had been here—and wondering. . . ."

" Marcus, did you think that I should be happier with Lucien de Québriac than—with you ? "

" Lenore, Lenore—you were so young when you made that choice, and I was growing old so fast . . ."

He was not able to say more. Something in the glory of her gaze passed into his soul. Words died upon his lips. He lay very still.

Lenore knelt down and wound her arms about him.

" Marcus," she said, and there was that in her voice which penetrated even to his failing consciousness, and brought it back in great waves of gladness, " Marcus—will you never understand ? "

CHAPTER XXX

UNITED

HE gazed at her as though he would read her very soul. He seemed to drink from her eyes some strange new life and strength and vigour. He sat erect, and drew her into the shelter of arms that held her fast—so fast—as though they would never let her go.

“Lenore, Lenore, Lenore!”

“Marcus—my husband—my beloved!”

“Your husband, yes,” he answered in his deep voice which slightly quivered with the intensity of his emotion. “But that other—ah, how I have wondered!—how I have feared!”

She looked into his eyes.

“Do you fear any more, Marcus—my husband—my beloved?”

She was clasped in his arms. She was held to his heart. She rested there as one who has found the haven of desire and of rest.

“Lenore, Lenore! how has it come—this great—this wonderful thing?”

“Marcus, I do not know myself. I only know that it is here.”

“It was not—like this—when we parted, Lenore.”

“No—it was not like this. It was beautiful in its way. I loved to know I belonged to you, Marcus. But now the joy is doubled and trebled; for I feel how you belong to me.

He strained her to him. It was as though from some wonderful and unseen source life was being poured into him—as though both of them drew it in, in great reviving draughts.

“Bone of my bone—flesh of my flesh. Lenore, Lenore! tell me it is no dream!”

“I could almost think it was one myself, Marcus, it

is so wonderful—so beautiful. But it is true, true, true. You are alive—my husband—my beloved. And you have come back to me. God has given me my heart's desire ! ”

“ Your heart's desire, Lenore, Lenore ! And I have been so full of doubts and fears ! How could I have so doubted you—how could I ? ”

“ Yes, how could you ? ” she answered, her head against his cheek, as she sat with his arm about her. “ And yet it was the very bigness of your great heart that worked for it. I understand. Do not try to explain it. What does anything matter which lies in that shadowy past ? God has brought us together again. He has given us our heart's desires. . . . ”

“ Yours as well as mine, Lenore ? Yours as well as mine ? ”

“ Mine as well as yours, Marcus,” she answered, her face close against his, her voice caught upon the edge of a sob of pure ecstasy. “ For, Marcus, what have I more to wish for than to be the wife of the man I love—the mother of his children ? ”

After that they sat in silence for a great while. Lucien's music filled the air about them with quivering of raptures.

Dr. Rodin presently looked in, advanced towards them rubbing his hands.

“ My medicine seems to have done you good, Lord Heristal.”

“ It has effected a cure, Doctor. And now my wife will take me home.”

“ Ha, ha ! So we begin to kick over the traces forthwith ? Excellent ! Excellent ! Well, we have been waiting and hoping for this day, and making preparation for it. There are clothes in readiness for you when you need them. But we must go gently at the first. Remember, you have been for long a very sick man.”

“ I have been less sick than I seemed for awhile now, Doctor. I have been half afraid of my waking. I delayed it somewhat. . . . ”

“ As I have suspected of late. Well, well, well—it

was perhaps nature's instinctive self-protection against too much emotion—even of joy. Give me your hand ! Ha ! you can grip again like a sound man ! Pulse steady and strong. Very good, very good. Yes, we will help you up. Then you shall see how you feel. And I will not hold you back from your own home an hour longer than need be. Trust me, my friends, for that ! ”

Diana was with the Marquise upon the south terrace. The light was just beginning to wester, and the magic of the evening was near at hand. They were talking together in low tones of the day's miracle—the giving back of Lord Heristal to life and health and joy—and wondering what would be the next stage in the drama, when the younger woman uttered an expression of astonished delight, and springing up, moved forward with gracious speed.

The Marquise turned her stately head, and she also rose from her seat.

Lenore and her husband were coming forward together towards them. Marcus had his hand upon his wife's shoulder, and they moved a little slowly. Otherwise there was little save his extreme attenuation to mark him as one but lately risen from a bed of sickness.

He was dressed with scrupulous care in clothes which were well cut and did not fit him amiss. His hair was a little sprinkled with grey, but it grew thickly over his head, and just showed the hint of its crisp curl. The features were very marked, for the bony structure showed all its firm modelling beneath the wasted tissues. But the eyes were full of life, and the glow in them was good to see. The Marquise was aware at once of a dominating personality and of a singularly handsome personage. She stepped forward with a very cordial graciousness.

“ You astonish us, Lord Heristal,” she said, “ but believe me, this sight is of the most welcome ! My felicitations, heartfelt and sincere, to you both. My child, it is good to have lived to see this day ! ”

She folded Lenore to her heart for a moment. Lucien

was conducting Marcus to a seat. Dr. Rodin and Leon came towards them smiling and well pleased. The Marquise for the moment took control of the situation.

"Lord Heristal, if you had watched with me the patient, faithful vigil which this sweet wife of yours has been keeping through this long five years, you would understand how all of us rejoice to see this fulfilment and consummation of her hopes! And indeed it is a great and glad day for us all. We have all known the wearing, weary waiting which had tried the whole world—nationally and individually. Now we know the gladness of release from fear, the joy of the blessed return of those whom we have loved and so well might have lost. I think it comes to all of us just as a foretaste of the joys which we hope and believe await us in the heavenly home, whither our feet are leading us, we trust, in the good God's own time."

Marcus loved to hear of Lenore from the Marquise, as he sipped tea and gazed hungrily upon the face of his wife. It was all so strange, so wonderful; and yet it was no dream. He was growing into the sense of its beautiful reality; and this came home yet more fully to him a little later, when Father Saint Barbe, who had come to share in the general rejoicing, and to take the little evening office in the chapel, as he did at five o'clock on certain days of the week, offered on his behalf and on that of Lenore his deep thanksgiving for mercies vouchsafed, in his deliverance from many and great dangers, and his safe return to his home and his wife.

Then in the beautiful glow of a radiant sunset hour Marcus and Lenore drove up the hill to their own house.

Softly she told him of much that lay upon her heart concerning that home. How she had loved it always, despite the sinister rumours which seemed to haunt it. How she had always believed that the good would triumph over evil. How she had never let herself confound material perils, the work of wicked men, with spiritual terrors in which she had put no credence, ever confident

that God gave His protection to those who put their trust in Him.

Marcus listened, his eyes upon Lenore's face, her hand clasped in his. Part of her discourse he heard; but much would have to be told him again. He could not concentrate his attention on the matter of her words; it was such absorbing happiness just to watch her face, to listen to the music of her voice—to know himself with her again at last—and on their way to that home he had prepared for her.

Nurse Frome's welcome went far to drive away the mists, as she stood at the doors to welcome them. News had reached the Maison Monastère of the miracle which had happened below, and it was good to be received in such a fashion and to have charge taken of them by one so fitted for the task.

It was like being children again to be taken over by that kind authority. She called them "a pair of kiddies" in that jovial, sympathetic way of hers. She had everything ready for their reception, and took them upstairs and hovered over them, till she had "her long lean laddie" safely in bed, where almost immediately he fell fast asleep holding Lenore's hand in his.

Later on, with her arm round Nurse Frome's kind neck, Lenore whispered to her all the story of their wonderful meeting, and the two happy women mingled their tears of joy together.

"We shall have to be careful of him for a little while, Dr. Rodin says," whispered Lenore. "It was a big thing that was adventured to-day—letting him see me—letting him dress and come home. But he said no matter if it puts him back a little; he will recover very quickly under our care. Oh, Nurse, Nurse, it is so wonderful, so beautiful! My husband here with us—all our own."

Lenore watched beside him all that night. He slept like a tired child. Once or twice he moved, opened his eyes, breathed her name, and sank to slumber again with her kiss upon his lips. She, too happy, too thankful for sleep,

kept her vigil till the light of morning glimmered in the east. Then, seeing that his sleep was profound, and that he was not likely to wake or miss her, she stole forth into the soft misty dimness of the new day, and made her way to the little chapel.

All was very dim and very still as she stole to her place, familiar now from constant use. The light burned steadily, and her upturned gaze fixed full upon it and then passed to that altar before which so many hours of supplication and prayer had been spent—that altar which for centuries had seen the incense cloud arise, which symbolizes the ascension into the presence of the God of all of the supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings of the Church, for which His Son became incarnate to redeem it to Himself and offer to His Father in Heaven.

The Sisters stole to their places, and with bent heads repeated their morning offices. With the broadening of the light halting steps from without made themselves heard, and the crippled men stole in by two's and three's and found their accustomed places.

The priest and his server took up their positions, and Lenore's heart was lifted up in a passionate glory of thanksgiving as she followed the familiar office with a full heart.

Later, the Reverend Mother and good Sisters pressed round, to kiss and congratulate her. They might have had dreams of her as belonging more completely to them in the future. But they had gentle, kindly, human women's hearts, and they knew how to rejoice with her in her rejoicing, as they had wept and prayed with her in her hours of sorrow.

"God bless and keep thee, my daughter," spoke the old priest holding her hands; and as she dropped upon one knee at his feet, he laid his hand upon her head, and bestowed upon her such a benediction as a loving father might have given to a loved child.

"You will come and see my husband, Father," she

said. "He will need to thank you for all your goodness to me."

"And I would thank Lord Heristal afresh for all that he has wrought here," Father Augustin answered, "as in the past I have had cause to thank him for what has been done here before you came, my child. I knew your husband but little in the past. I shall renew my friendship with him with much of satisfaction. He is a great man."

The *éclopés* had heard the news. They crowded about Lenore as she came amongst them, as was her habit, to wish them a Good day, and see that all was well with them.

They raised a cheer for her and for the milord who had come back. But there was an anxious look in some of the eyes bent upon her which she was quick to interpret.

"Have no fear, my brave boys," she told them, "have no fear. My husband shall come and tell you for himself the good-will he bears you all! Has he not suffered himself through this so cruel war? And will not his great heart hold a place for such as you, my children, who have fought and bled for France? Have no fear! This your home will remain your home yet. And you shall see for yourself how a soldier feels from England, who has fought upon the soil of la Patrie, and has watched her sufferings and her heroism."

They looked at her with adoration in their eyes, and then one cried something and Lenore turned—turned to see a tall attenuated figure coming towards her in the morning light, at sight of whom the *éclopés* set up a great huzzah.

Lenore sped towards her husband with a happy face.

"Oh, Marcus! should you be up so soon? But come and see my brave boys! They have made such happiness for me in my loneliness here! And they are your boys also—our children, Marcus! See how they welcome you! Go and speak to them, dear heart! Do not let them for a moment fear that your return will rob them

of their home. I love them, every one—and you will love them too ! ”

He spoke with them in their own tongue, fluently, easily, as one brave man who has seen and understood speaks with his fellows who have also been there in the furnace. He bid them welcome to that home his wife had opened for them. He spoke of what he felt towards those who had offered their all, and had suffered as these had done. He told them that the work begun by his wife in his absence would be enlarged and carried on by them, now that they could work together. How many, many of such shattered bodies were there needing help and tendance ! Well, some others should share with them the comforts of this *Maison de Miséricorde*, and the name should go down to posterity as that of a home of refuge for such as needed it, who had greatly dared and greatly suffered.

Again the huzzahs went up, men crowded round to kiss the hem of Lenore's garment, to press the lean strong hand that Marcus extended. Happy faces—glad grateful voices !—and the throb of the springtide in the air. It was a never-to-be-forgotten moment, as Lenore stood there amongst her “ children ” with her hand upon her husband's arm.

Then they went away together—walked the length of the east terrace, and looked down upon the glory of the new-born day.

“ Marcus, Marcus !—you mean all that—for my poor maimed boys—and others ? ”

“ I mean it all, my treasure, my wife ! You indeed have raised up a beautiful memorial to the Heristal name ! I have been hearing of it. It is the thing above all others that I would have associated with our name here in the island which we love. Our home cannot be here. Duties call us to England. Our life lies there. But what matter ? Here we shall have a *pied-à-terre*. Here we shall spend happy weeks of *villeggiatura* amongst these lovely hills and our groves and gardens upon which

they look down. We will have our corner, kept for ourselves. Nurse Frome shall be installed as our representative here. Our friends the De Québriacs will keep watch for us and report. And we will visit our *éclopés* each year, and renew our beautiful days—those days which we are about to taste together. Lenore, Lenore! tell me once again that it is no dream! It is so wonderful—such a miracle! That all this long, long separation has made you more truly mine! When I had thought . . .”

Her hand was on his lips. Her eyes were lifted to his.

“Let us forget that ever you thought it. It was your one tiny injustice to your wife! Marcus, Marcus! let there be no looking back into the shadows. Let us walk forward fearlessly, because we walk hand in hand, into the glorious light which lies before us—the glory of our united love.”

Then he took her in his arms and held her fast.

“My wife—my wife!”

THE END.

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